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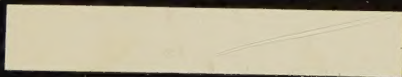
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GIVING A MAN
ANOTHER CHANCE

GIVING A MAN ANOTHER CHANCE

And Other Sermons

PROPERTY OF
L. A. BAPTIST THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

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To

Z. V. S. S.

*This book is affectionately
inscribed*



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GIVING A MAN
ANOTHER CHANCE

“And some days after, Paul
said unto Barnabas, Let us
go again,” etc.

—*Acts 15 : 36-41.*

I

GIVING A MAN ANOTHER CHANCE

“**L**ET us go again,” said Paul to Barnabas. It was not long ago they returned from that first missionary journey. It had been disastrous in the extreme. Persecutions had met them. They were expelled from Antioch; were driven from Iconium by threats of stoning, were actually stoned and Paul was left for dead at Lystra. They’ll not go that way very soon again, I venture to say. Oh, but you do not know these apostles. “Let us go again and visit our brethren in every city where we have preached.” There is more heroic manhood in those words than our first careless thought suggests. It meant something to Paul with his body still aching, perchance, from the stoning and persecution of that first journey to say, “Let us go again.”

The very next picture is that of contention. No sooner the proposition made than Paul and Barnabas begin to quarrel over the details. First, great strength and mighty heroism. Then immediately little weaknesses. What a commentary on our poor human nature. Thus always do little vices, yes, and sometimes great

vices lie very close to great virtues. You made a beautiful prayer in the prayer-meeting. It uplifted all who heard, but you quarreled with your wife on the way home. You made a great sacrifice for Christ the other day and then did something underhanded in your business. Paul is mighty here. There is something at first sight colossal in the man and before you know it he is dwarfed into the pigmy. Thank God, the veriest saints are weak like you and me. There is a grain of comfort in the thought that even Paul could make a slip.

The trouble between Barnabas and Paul was over Mark. He had gone with them for a little on that first journey and had slipped away. He turned back before the real dangers of that journey began. Perhaps he saw that trouble was ahead. Mark was young, and not yet prepared for the rough, hard fight. It is evident that his return was in the nature of a flinching from the danger or the hardships. It was by no means creditable to Mark. He flinched at the time he ought to have stood like a man. And Paul, with the great, mighty courage which was born in him, despised a flincher. He couldn't believe that there was anything good in Mark. Barnabas on the other hand was related to Mark. He felt that there was yet a great deal that was good in the boy. Mark's mother was Mary, the sister of Barnabas, and it was at her

house in Jerusalem where they were holding that prayer-meeting to which Peter came at night when he was released from prison. Mark's mother was one of the very strongest and noblest of the Christian women. Her house seems to have been a kind of headquarters for the persecuted Christians. Perhaps she had allowed Mark to go with Barnabas and had said, "Now, Barnabas, watch over my boy and do your best to keep him true." Whether it was this relationship or not, or whether it was that Barnabas saw the possibility of better things in Mark, he meant to stand by him, and so Paul and Barnabas fell out all because of Mark. What a pity this, that these two great leaders of the early Church should thus stand in bitter contention. There is nothing creditable here. Paul sinks a little in one's estimation. It will all work harm to the Church of God. But no, God uses the wrath of men to praise Him, and to this incident we owe the fact that now four missionaries are in the field instead of two, for Paul takes Silas and Barnabas takes Mark and they go out preaching Jesus. I often think of this when my heart gets sore over a divided Christendom, when I see the multiplied denominations and divisions of Christians. But I believe that these very quarrels which have rent and torn the Church have multiplied greatly the preaching of Christ, and that the Church has needed the spur of denominational

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rivalry. Be sure of this, however much the kingdom may seem to be rent and torn by division, God lives and reigns over all, and the wrath of men shall yet redound to the building up of His kingdom.

1. The first thing I want you to notice then as we take up this incident is *the giving a man another chance*. I shall not dwell upon Paul's mistake. Many perhaps would defend him. Paul's rigorous sense of justice impelled him to take this stand. No doubt Mark deserved it, for he had done a weak and cowardly thing. But Barnabas stands for the giving the man another chance. Thank God for Barnabas. Every time I run up against Barnabas I love him more. Paul, you are not the man to stand out against Barnabas. If it were not for Barnabas you would have had a different place from that you have in the Church. Don't you remember, Paul, when you went down not long after your conversion to see the apostles at Jerusalem, how not one of them would have anything to do with you? Don't you remember that night there as you were wandering disconsolate, wondering why it was the apostles shunned you and doubted you, as you were walking in the street near the temple a stranger came up to you and said, "Aren't you Saul of Tarsus? Well, I am Barnabas. Saul, the rest of our company do not believe in you. They think you are just trying

to get more information so you can persecute us, but I want to give you my hand to-night and tell you I believe you are a changed man, and I will do everything I can to get the apostles to see you." Ah, Paul, that was a time when you were distrusted far more than Mark is to-day, and Barnabas believed in you, trusted in you, and that very day he went to the apostles and said, "Here, you must receive this man. He is a changed man," and it was Barnabas that went after you the very next day and brought you to the secret meeting place of the apostles. He was for giving you a chance, Paul. Better follow his advice now. Barnabas knows human nature far better than you. Then again you owe more than that to Barnabas. Paul, we didn't see anything of you for four years. All we know is that you went up to Tarsus after that meeting with the disciples. Not one word is written about what you were doing these four years. Perhaps you were flinching. All we know is this, that when there came about the great revival at Antioch, the apostles at Jerusalem thought wise to send an experienced man there, and sent Barnabas, and Barnabas on the way up happened to think of you, and said to himself, "I wonder what has become of that young Saul. If I am any judge of a man, I believe he would make a magnificent worker for the kingdom." He

stops for a while in Antioch and then goes post haste to Tarsus and brings you to Antioch. After working there a few months the Holy Ghost says, "Separate Me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them," and your work as a missionary apostle began; but you owe it all to Barnabas, and yet now you are quarreling with him. I believe you are wrong, Paul. I trust Barnabas' judgment, and what surprises us is that you could stand out against such a noble, splendid man.

Oh, yes, friends, there is something marvelously winsome about this Barnabas. I like that attitude of his. Give a man another chance, Paul. That is what Barnabas stands for. Let it be admitted that Mark was weak, abominably weak, before. He is older now and he wants a chance to redeem himself. I have a great deal of hope for him. I pledge you if you will consent to his going that he will stand like a rock. Oh, what an inspiration to Mark such hope must have been! Crushed as he was by the memory of his weakness and by Paul's manifest disfavor, what a comfort to find some one believed in him. Many a man, I venture to say, who has done a mean thing and has regretted it a thousand times in tears, would be saved for better things if some one only believed in him. The most powerful impulse that can stir men's hearts to noblest effort is the consciousness that some one is hop-

ing in you and hoping for you. A man begins to hope in himself when he finds a friend has confidence in him. But if every one is like Paul, hard, severe, making no allowance for human weakness, judging sternly and without mercy, the little spark of hope for better life within a man's own breast is quickly, rudely extinguished. Barnabas trusts and hopes in Mark. It was the trust and hope of that dear friend that saved Mark in the most critical period of his life. Barnabas stood for giving him another chance.

2. But notice secondly, *the taking of the chance*. I wonder how it will affect Mark. He must be profoundly stirred and moved by this contention of which he was the cause. He must have been crushed by Paul's severity and lifted again by Barnabas' faith and hope in him. But what will be the ultimate effect? Barnabas sinks out of history. All we know is that he and Mark went off to Cyprus to preach Jesus. No account is given us of their labors. The historian is busy recording the labors of Paul. All the rest of the apostles are left out of the history. Even Peter will disappear and we shall never know his end. But it is most interesting to find allusions to Mark here and there in the epistles and the after history which make perfectly plain the way he stood the test, and which abundantly vindicate Barnabas' wisdom. After Barnabas and Mark returned from Cyprus, we

know that Mark went to Peter. Peter was his spiritual father and Mark loved him, and in Peter's first epistle he says, "The church at Babylon saluteth you ; and so doth Marcus my son." It matters not whether you believe Babylon to have been Rome as the Catholic church argues, or in reality Babylon, which is more likely, we catch a glimpse of Mark faithful and working hard for Christ with Peter. And then again the day comes when Paul takes back the hard things he had said about Mark, for soon we find Mark laboring at the side of Paul. Three times he refers to Mark in his epistles. In Colossians he says, "Marcus, sister's son to Barnabas, saluteth you, if he come unto you, receive him." In Philemon Paul calls him "Marcus, my fellow laborer," and in Second Timothy, the very last epistle which Paul wrote, written too just before his death, in which he says, "I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand."—"Demas hath forsaken me," "only Luke is with me."—"Do thy diligence to come unto me quickly," he adds, "Take Mark, and bring him with thee : for he is useful to me for the ministry." In other words, now at his death hour the one man next to his beloved Luke and Timothy that Paul wants near his side is this very Mark, whom years before he had so remorselessly condemned. That is splendid, Paul, magnificent amends to Mark for

the way you distrusted him once. Without this word he would have gone down into history with the stamp of your disapproval, but now you tell the world you were wrong and that Mark has made a noble Christian worker.

Yes, and the reason was, Mark did not abuse the confidence Barnabas had placed in him. Crushed and discouraged as he was, it was an exceedingly grave crisis for the boy. Now his life will turn abruptly to better things, or he will give himself in utter recklessness over to the drifting of the tides and let go all anchorage to God. Thank God he stood the test. He found inspiration in the thought that Barnabas trusted him. He said to himself, I'll let Barnabas know that he hasn't misplaced his confidence, and I'll show Paul that he is mistaken, and so Mark went again into the fight for Christ with a courage and hope that lasted to the end.

Yes, Mark took the chance. His splendid work with Peter was followed by noble service with Paul, and then finally, when these two aged saints had gone to their reward, Mark goes to the city of Alexandria, and as tradition tells us, he laid with master hand the foundations of Christianity in that brilliant and commanding city. As Bishop of Alexandria no name was held in higher reverence in the early Church, and when the Venetians built their great cathedral centuries afterward and desired the bones of a great saint

to lie beneath it, they sent to Alexandria and secured the bones of this Mark, who, when a young man, had flinched in the service of the King. Many of you have stood before the very crypt where these remains now lie. But even this is not all. Turn to the Bible—the second gospel is one of the most precious heritages of the Church. Skeptics acknowledge that it bears the stamp of truth. This precious gospel is a proof how thoroughly Mark was owned and used of God. We couldn't miss that gospel. It is by far the most graphic of the four and its value to the Church is all untold. And yet all that splendid service with Peter and Paul, all of his noble work at Alexandria, and even this priceless gospel were all in the balance that day when Barnabas, dear old Barnabas, stood out for giving the man another chance.

Oh, my hearers, doesn't the truth to-day cry a stop to our pessimism, our unfailing distrust of men, our assumption that men never will be better than they are? I often wonder how many an unfortunate one have I helped a little down the steep grade by my refusal to believe in him. God help us to trust men, for there is no other way to make them trust and hope in themselves. Men know their own weaknesses only too well. They are already discouraged and crushed by the world's frown, and more than that, by the condemnation of their own consciences. They do

not need your distrust, your cynical sneer, to make them more hopeless than they are. They need your smile, your best encouragement, the consciousness that you do not despair in them, that you really have hope that in the power of God they yet can live for better things. We must not crush men like Paul. We must light the fires of hope within them with the great, noble, splendid hopefulness of Barnabas.

3. Now notice thirdly and finally I find here a *picture of God*. Where? In Paul? God's justice, God's stern unrelenting judgments? No, not in Paul, but in the giving another chance of Barnabas.

When shall we learn the lesson that God is far more merciful than man? Here is a sinning woman at Jesus' feet. The Pharisees crowd around the Lord crying for her condemnation. That's man. Jesus says, "Neither do I condemn thee, go, and sin no more." That's God. The thief condemned by human tribunal for fearful sins, groans upon the cross, suffering well-deserved punishment. That's man. To his cry for mercy the suffering Jesus answers, "This day shalt thou be with Me in Paradise." That's God. Peter denied his Lord three times and with bitter cursings. The rest of the eleven, I fancy, had it been left to them, would have decreed his banishment from their circle. That's man. Jesus told the angel to tell the women at

the sepulchre He wanted to see the disciples *and Peter*. That's God. Your wife, your friends, your family have lost hope in you and you richly deserve their distrust. Perhaps there isn't a human being who believes in you. That's man. "Though your sins be as scarlet they shall be whiter than snow." That's God. Laodicea, the lukewarm, recreant, world-loving, lapsed and faithless church, fit only to be spued out of one's mouth, discipleship which has had great privileges and has trampled them in the dust, and has not a single heart throb of love, there is no punishment too severe. That's man. "Behold I stand at the door and knock : if any man hear My voice and open the door, I will come in to him and will sup with him, and he with Me." That's God. Jacob, cheat, supplanter, crafty one, mean and despicable, that's man. "Thou shalt be called Israel, for as a prince hast thou power with God and with men and hast prevailed." That's God. Mark, a bruised reed, a broken staff. He put his hand to the plough and turned back. He is not fit for the kingdom of God. That's Paul. "A bruised reed shall he not break, and the smoking flax shall he not quench"—that is Barnabas and that is God.

" For the love of God is broader
 Than the measure of man's mind,
 And the heart of the Eternal
 Is most wonderfully kind."

Oh, I wish I could teach men that God loves them, hopes in them, believes in the possibility of holier living for one and all, and that He bids every sin-sick child of His to hope in himself by hoping first of all in Him. The artist in the ungainly block of Carrara marble sees the beautiful form of the Christ which his skill is to bring out from the dull ungainliness. So it was that Jesus ever looked on men. He ever saw the possible self, the redeemed self, the soul clothed with the garments of Christlikeness which His own nailed hands would cast about it. No wonder He loved men, for He saw the glorious possibilities behind the sin and ruin, and He had hope, blessed, inspiring hope for man.

May I pause here just long enough to say that this is what a hopeless world needs most of all. Men are crushed by earth's sins and earth's hard battle. It is one of the saddest aspects of life that comes to my attention to see how often it is associated with hopelessness. Men and women here drag on with their weary burdens with no hope of better things, mourning their sins, too, but with no hope of changing them. Oh, if the gospel of Jesus could only be preached in its fulness of hope to such as these. If men could only see how, though the Paul condemns, Barnabas believes: though the world cries their punishment, Jesus not only hopes in them but bids them to hope in themselves, surely the world would soon

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turn to Jesus. Oh, this is what I love about the teachings of Jesus. He did not preach total depravity, though it is implied in every word. "No man," says a writer, "ever preached that doctrine so eloquently as He who never mentioned it," but what He did preach and emphasize was human capacity, possibility of better things. He taught men to believe in themselves by believing first of all in Him, and so under His gospel the darkened souls of men like the soul of the Magdalene, became flooded with a new hope for themselves which grounded itself in their hope in Jesus. God forgive us Christians if we ever lose hope in man, fallen man. I know the power of sin is mighty, but we have a mightier Saviour who loves and trusts and hopes in man till the last, and who is ever bidding man to hope in himself by hoping in Him. I want you to help me to preach this truth. I want you to go out in the strength of it and light the fires of hope in every discouraged soul. Tell man not of his meanness and littleness and sin. He knows it all too well. Tell him of his towering greatness, his possibility of holiness in Jesus. Tell him that Christ believes in him, trusts him, hopes in him, and He asks one thing only, that he should trust and hope in himself by trusting and hoping in Him. This is the gospel of Barnabas. Thank God it is the gospel too of Jesus.

May God forgive me if I ever have slighted

this truth. It gets larger and larger as I think of it. Oh, men, who know your sin and littleness, who bemoan the dark iniquity which works in secret within, who have sometimes longed for purer living but are now discouraged and just about to give up the battle, Jesus believes in you as He sees the possibility of transformed and ennobled life through His helpfulness. He stands for giving a man another chance. Aye, He said not seven times, but seventy times seven, shalt thou forgive thy brother. Did you ever realize before the mercy and the love of God? See that you do not abuse such transcending love. Tell the Master to-day, "Lord, with Thy help I'll try to be worthy of Thy trust." Come, yes, come to-day and lay your hearts, your lives, down at Jesus' feet, who, when all others forsake, believes and hopes in you to the end.

EARTHLY COMPULSIONS
AND DIVINE PURPOSES

“And He must needs go
through Samaria.”

—*John 4 : 4.*

II

EARTHLY COMPULSIONS AND DIVINE PURPOSES

NO life is absolutely under its own control. It is molded and turned and forced hither and thither by the power of circumstances. Circumstances contrive to drive one man into business and another into professional life, to give to one riches and to another sore privations and poverty, to lift one to fame and high position, to plunge others to irretrievable ruin. Every close observer of human life has marked the constraining power of circumstance. By some physical compulsion which we cannot understand, our lives are driven hither and thither like a drifting vessel amid the contrary winds. Constraining forces which we cannot resist seem to sport with life and fortune, leading us where we never dreamed to follow.

In the face of this truth so plain to all of us, our hearts longingly ask what part in God's plan do these constraining circumstances of life have? Are we to be buffeted by chance hither and thither on every restless wave—at the mercy of every crowding influence which may happen to touch our lives? Have the outward physical compul-

sions, those powerful constraining influences which go so far in shaping life, have they or have they not a part in God's plan? Much of life's deepest meaning centers in and about the answer to this question.

And it is for the purpose of seeking light upon this fundamental question that I ask you to study with me this peculiar incident in Jesus' life. It seems He had been in Jerusalem. For six months He has been preaching in Judea. His disciples are with Him, and through the converts made and baptized, His following has become so large that the Pharisees, those jealous guardians of Jewish interests, are becoming alarmed. What movement or threats they made against Jesus are not indicated in the narrative, but it is evident that by reason of their hostility, Jesus, whose time had not yet come, thought best to go back into Galilee. But the province of Samaria lay between the two provinces of Judea and Galilee and Jesus must pass through it to get to Galilee. Hence at first sight the text expresses only a truth most simple and commonplace, "He must needs go through Samaria."

But remember this, that Jesus had no dealings with the Samaritans. Jesus never in His life preached publicly there or did His wondrous works. The inhabitants of Samaria were upon terms of bitterest enmity with the Jews. And the reason was this—they were for the most part

foreigners or aliens. After the captivity of the ten tribes, Shalmaneser, and after him his grandson Esar-haddon, Assyrian kings, sent colonies of Assyrian people to occupy the province of Samaria. These Eastern people, coalescing with the very poor and widely scattered remnant of Israel, became soon known as the Samaritans. When the Jews were allowed to come back to Jerusalem and rebuild the temple, these Samaritans wished to join them in the work, but they were refused, and from that time a bitter hostility existed between the Jews and the Samaritans.

And now these rival peoples with the same religion (the Samaritan, however, accepting only the pentateuch of the Jewish Scriptures) and yet different temples, at the time of our Lord's life stood facing one another with most contemptuous hatred. The Samaritans refused hospitality to Jewish pilgrims and did all in their power to annoy the Jews. Oftentimes Jewish travelers were waylaid and subjected to personal violence. This treatment the Jews returned with added scorn. The Samaritans were publicly cursed in their synagogues. They were debarred from witnessing in Jewish courts—the bitterest reproach in their language was to call one a Samaritan. They charged them with idolatry—they excluded them from every hope of eternal life. They strove in every way to ostracize

them, avoiding even any and all dealings with them. Hence the text is not the simple statement that it seems, "He must needs go through Samaria." It represents an experience of most disagreeable and possibly dangerous character, and yet He *must* go thus. There is no other way except a long detour which is dangerous and burdensome for other reasons. He is crowded by a physical necessity, forced by the constraining power of circumstances to pass this way. "He must needs go through Samaria."

This then is the earthly scene. Let me paint for you now another. This other scene is heaven's councils. There is a woman in Samaria whom God hath chosen. There is a city there which God would bless. The Father wills that the woman of Samaria shall meet the Christ and learn from Him of that living water of which, if a man drink, he shall never die. God wills that there, through this woman and those about her, His kingdom shall be established. God's purposes are pendant on that journey through Samaria. Should Christ hesitate or turn aside into some other way, the purposes of God may fail.

And now mark the unfolding of that earthly drama. Jesus, driven and impelled by a seeming physical and earthly necessity, is drawing near that well at Sychar. But note, too, that heaven's purposes by that very action are drawing near to

their fulfilment. It seems as if the earth forces were working hand in hand with the heavenly ; as if the physical compulsions and these chance influences of earth were only servants to do the will of heaven. Jesus meets the woman at the well—He speaks unto her the words of eternal life. She calls her neighbors and the villagers, they crowd around Jesus ! They constrain Him to abide with them. Two days the Christ and His disciples stayed in that city of Samaria. Two days, we need not doubt, of earnest words and teaching. Many of the Samaritans believed, and the kingdom of God gained a foothold in Samaria.

This, my friend, is the full inspiring thought. The physical and the spiritual necessities go hand in hand. The earth coercions that drive us hither and thither in life are in reality only the outward and visible expression of the hidden purposes of God. Could we get this thought home to our consciousness, what an added glory and meaning it would give to life. We are not driven to this side and to that by blind, unreasoning forces. No ! the earthly compulsions that seem to mock our wills and to sport with life and fortune are only the earthly type of a higher necessity that grounds itself in the will and purposes of God. Thank God, life is not a game at chance—the throwing of dice, the casting of a penny. The purposes of the most high God are in it, finding

their visible expression in these seeming chance compulsions, and constraining influences of life.

I know this is not an easy truth to grasp. We can believe it when all is smooth and easy sailing in life, but when we must needs go through some Samaria, when some painful experience is before us, then the temptation comes to believe that God's hand has been taken off and life is swinging at the mercy of the cruelest fate.

And, my friends, these experiences are the lot of every life. There come times to all of us when we must pass through Samaria. It seems as if some of our lives were one long and constant passing through Samaria. Here is a man who loves God and loves his fellow man. You look upon him as in every sense a man of splendid Christian character; and yet one misfortune after another follows him. He seems to be driven by some heartless destiny which he cannot avoid and which is forcing him into embarrassments and perplexities of every kind. And through all these sorrows he must pass. He cannot escape them. "He must needs go through Samaria."

And again yonder is another, who you know has more than his share of burden. Financial straits and distress become his lot, while the demands upon heart and purse are doubled—sleepless nights, long days of anxiety, ceaseless worry and pain are constant dwellers in that heart,—while he sees no way out of the diffi-

culty, no possible escape. He too must needs go through Samaria—some seeming physical and earthly compulsion is forcing him into just these difficulties.

Oh, my friends, travelers by the way passing through some hard and cheerless Samaria, can we not catch this blessed truth? The physical compulsions in life are only the earthly counterparts of God's heavenly purpose. It is God's plan and pattern for our lives which these earthly constraints are realizing.

And now let me turn from the general statement of this truth to some of its more practical bearings.

1. The inspiration in it.

I have said there are times when we doubt this truth. Oh! but there are other times in life when we cannot help believing. There are few of us who now cannot look back upon life and see clearly marked places where God's hand has touched it. We can look even upon the desolate places in life, the years that were crowded with misfortune, and see how by those very disasters God's purpose has been accomplished in us. The truth that not a sparrow falleth, that the hairs of our head are numbered, that the Father knoweth what things ye have need of before ye ask Him, all this blessed circle of truth which brings God so close to human life is made too plain in the Word and in the experience of life to doubt it.

And notice the inspiration of the thought when closely grasped to our heart. It takes away something from that dreadful extemporaneousness of life—that awful fear of the future, that painful apprehension of accident and calamity, as if life were only a sport for every chance wind and storm. It takes away the chaos of confused and empty meanings and gives to it a significance of grandest outlook and possibility—and more than all this it puts God into life as its overruling designer and director. However much of desolation life may have for us, it takes away much of the pain, if we know that all things work together and that it is God that worketh in us, for then faith rises to that high vantage ground where we can “trust our risen Lord and know that every pain and every loss He sends us is to bring some greater gain.”

Put these two pictures before you, of one life that is forgetful of this truth and another that lives in constant realization of it. Let the same earthly coercions and compulsion send each through some desolate and cheerless Samaria. The one sees nothing but the bleak chilly winds of cruel disaster, and mourns that he, while others escape, must fall a victim to relentless destiny. I say, my friends, what a wild and mad frenzy of Christless and un comforted grief must wring such a soul. To the other every disaster has divinest meaning. Every constraining influence

of life that crowds him towards misfortune, he knows to be only the working out of God's eternal purpose for his earthly life, and hence, with triumphant faith, he lifts his heart till it rests safe and peaceful in the very bosom of God. There is no comparison in the peace and joy of those lives. The recognition of this truth absolutely transfigures life and bathes its darkest and most desolate experiences with the glory and brightness of a heavenly meaning.

2. God's purposes in our lives can be known to us.

There is abundant comfort in the thought that God has a purpose for us and that these strange compulsions of this earthly life are assisting in the working out of that purpose—but what a world of inspiration it would be if our spiritual vision could be so illumined that we could see even here into God's plan and purpose for us.

But I affirm we can know it.

In the first place, because God's general purpose for man is so clearly revealed. It is that man may grow in righteousness and holiness. This is one part of His purpose for us. The other is that we may be helpful one to another, uplifting those about us, doing manful work for the cause of righteousness and truth. Now at the very outset, God's special purpose for our life must accord with this wide and grand purpose for all humanity. Our lives are given us that we may

grow in holiness and help others to grow therein.

Now notice again. We have often marked God's pointing finger in our past experiences. We have been crowded into certain places by the coercing power of circumstances quite beyond our control. We looked into God's face and wondered why we were thus led, and then in the midst of our perplexity and bewilderment some new view of life and its eternal verities which showed us how false had been our previous estimates, or some experience of discipline, or some grand opportunities for usefulness, have been given us; and then from out the darkness came a light and we knew that these crowding, compelling influences of life had been indeed the earthly voice of God's most holy will concerning us. How often this light has come to us in our past experiences. We can trust our risen Lord that this hidden purpose of every Samaria will be revealed to us.

And still again I ask you to notice how that purpose may be discovered if we bravely meet every opportunity of the experience.

Jesus must needs go through Samaria. He may have known or He may have been ignorant of His Father's purpose in that journey. But He found it, in meeting and embracing the opportunity that the journey offered. They were pausing at the well at Sychar. A woman of

Samaria was there. Here was golden opportunity to speak for truth and for His Father. Jesus' lips might have been closed and the Father's purpose never have been accomplished. But Jesus spake, and God's will was done.

Now, my friends, as we journey through Samaria, notice the abundant opportunities before us. First for self-improvement and then for the ennoblement of others. If you will tell me how you have met these opportunities, I will tell you whether God's purpose in leading you through these desolate places has been accomplished. You have been led through hard and trying experiences. Have you used them to ennoble life, to build and fortify your character, to increase and strengthen faith? Have you manfully met every opportunity to uplift and encourage those about you? If so, let me tell you the God purpose in your life has joined hand with the earth compulsions, and your life is grandly answering to the pattern and the plan of God; but if on the contrary you spend the days in sighing and repining and never think to find God's purpose in it all; if you never meet the opportunities to ennoble self thereby or to uplift others, then the earth coercions and the God purpose are shooting clear of one another, and the experience has failed to accomplish what God designed it for. All its bitterness is left, but you missed its meaning and lost forever its

grand possibilities of fruitage to you and to others.

Oh, my hearers, study the Samaritans in life. Whenever you must needs enter them, look for higher purposes—they are always in it. Meet every opportunity and manfully make the very desert places of life to yield the richest fruitage of soul development. Nothing in God's plan is meaningless. No distress, be it of sickness, or want, or heavy burdens, of financial straits or sorrow or loss, is sent for naught. The earth compelling forces may drive us into them, but there is a higher purpose, hidden now, of which the earth compulsions are only the outward and visible expression. Believe and seek that higher purpose, and your life shall be transfigured in its meaning, shall grow in holiness and in the gathering peace and joy of accomplishing the will of God.

3. But one more and final thought. The desolate experiences when we must needs pass through Samaria may have real and positive comfort by the way. The first is this. They will not last forever—Galilee, bright and joyous Galilee, lies but a little further onward.

Galilee was the home of Jesus' friends. Here He had turned the water into wine, and called His chosen ones. There is a charm of association about Galilee that no other part of Palestine possesses. It must have been a place very dear to Jesus. What matter then if Samaria were cold

in hospitality and the journey through a cheerless one—Galilee lay a little further onward.

Oh, my hearer, a Galilee whose sea is crystal, whose city walls are built of jasper, its streets of gold and every gate a pearl, with its thousand times ten thousand of white robed angels who will throng to welcome you, lies a little further onward when you have passed Samaria. What matter the cares and troubles by the way? What reck's it if with aching brow and troubled heart we journey, and with feet that are torn and bleeding from the stones along the way, if Galilee lies beyond us? Here is comfort, inspiration for our hearts. By this thought life's sorrows are comforted and the hard and dangerous road through this dark Samaria is illumined and made resplendent by this blessed hope of immortality. Let the strife be bitter if it will—let dangers gather and sorrows increase. It is a thought of blessed comfort that this short life will soon be over, that though conflict be a bitter one'tis not so very long.

“A little while for patient vigil-keeping,
To face the storm and wrestle with the strong.”

And the rest and joy and peace beyond are for eternity. This thought of immortality, could we only grasp it, ought to make a Bethel out of the blackest wretchedness.

“Oh, for a faith to grasp heaven's bright forever
Amid the shadows of earth's little while.”

But Jesus had other comforts on that journey through Samaria. When His disciples pressed Him He said, "I have meat to eat that ye know not of."

So have you, Christian. Hidden supports, helps unknown to the world, but known to you in the dark hours. You know what it is to have the Christ take a burden from you. Sometimes in the best moments of religious life, although earthly affairs were the darkest, have you not met your Saviour in such close and helpful sympathy, that all the earthly disaster could not change that peace of soul? And have you not then been able to cry to men about you, "I have meat to eat that ye know not of"? Ah, this is the most blessed truth of all in this passing through Samaria. God's arms shall be beneath, His whisper of peace within you, His hand close clasped about your own. Jesus never said before, "I have meat to eat that ye know not of," but now He says it. The helpfulness and love of God are fully manifested in times of our greatest weakness and danger, when by some earthly compulsion we must needs go through Samaria.

And now isn't this a blessed truth? I wonder can we not gain from it a new courage to meet the trials and privations, the distresses, the worries, the disasters, the sorrows by the way. I think that life is absolutely transfigured in its light. It covers it with such real

and glorious meaning. Oh, my friends, these earth forces and compulsions are not the meaningless things we have thought. They are the earthly expression of God's eternal purpose. Take this truth to heart in your times of desolation. Believe it and gain new courage from it. Gather too the comforts that lie around you by the way and remember, remember that Galilee lies but a little further onward.

THE INFLUENCE
OF A LIFE

“And by the hands of the apostles were many signs and wonders wrought among the people, . . . insomuch that they brought forth the sick into the streets, and laid them on beds and couches, that at the least the shadow of Peter passing by might overshadow some of them.”

—*Acts 5: 12-15.*

III

THE INFLUENCE OF A LIFE¹

EMERSON says, "What you are speaks so loud, I cannot hear what you say." He meant that character tells more than speech; that what a man actually is in his inmost life is more powerful eloquence than the words that flow from his lips. It is only putting the same thought in other words to say that every man casts a shadow that is the flavor of his own character, and is telling either for good or for evil. Sometimes it has healing in its wings, as with Peter; sometimes it blights and curses, as with Jeroboam. The shadow that we cast is our influence; not our conscious influence, but the influence that unconsciously emanates from what we are. Every man and every woman is telling either for or against the Christ. It makes little difference what may be the speech or profession; the real influence of a life comes from what a man is. "What you are speaks so loud, I cannot hear what you say."

Now to see more clearly the power of this unconscious influence of a life, notice how closely the world is bound together. Take a common

¹ Preached at Northfield.

bit of steel. Science tells us that this bit of steel is made up of an infinite number of invisible atoms, which although separated from each other by infinitesimally small spaces, nevertheless do not touch each other ; and yet so enormous are the forces that hold those atoms together, that this piece of steel seems to be a single substance. Touch one end of it with a hammer and the impact communicates itself from atom to atom until it is felt at the other end. Apply great heat to it, and the force loosens until the atoms begin to revolve around each other, and the piece of steel becomes a liquid. You cannot touch a single atom without all the other atoms feeling it.

Now society is somewhat that kind of a body. The individual is the atom, and holds special relationship to every other individual. You cannot touch one member of society without other members near feeling the influence of your action. This is the reason society is so feverish and fitful ; every one of us must readjust our relations because of any change in the life or character of another. The atoms are in a whirl ; and yet so closely are they bound together, and so enormous is the force holding them together, that to influence one is to influence many.

To illustrate this in a most practical way : Can you not remember the time when the first knowledge of evil came to your young heart ? You were living in the innocence of childhood, and

some other heart opened your eyes to the knowledge of the sin in the world. A curse upon the influence that blighted our childish heart so early ! Can you not remember, later on, when plastic young manhood or womanhood was waiting to take form for eternal character, how you saw another Christian stand up in the manliness of a noble life, and how that other heart gave courage to your fainting purpose and called you to resolute decision of character ? The other life was all unconscious that it had influenced you, but you trace something of the nobility of life that you hold to-day, to the silent, all-persuasive power of that one life.

No feature of electrical science interests me more than the subject of induced currents. Let two wires be hung side by side and yet not touch each other. Then send a current of electricity over one wire, and there will be a weaker reproduction of it in the other. This is the reason why when you listen at the telephone you can often hear other voices. The wires have not crossed, but there is an induced current from another wire in the one to which your 'phone is attached. It is due to this also that we can telegraph from a moving train. A wire is run from the baggage car into proximity to the wires on the telegraph poles along the track. Then the wire is brought back into the car to complete the circuit and attached to an instrument. The current which passes over

the wires on the poles induces a similar though weaker current in the wire running from the train, and *vice versa*. Thus messages can be sent and read by delicate instruments.

Now, my friends, the whole question of moral influence in life is the question of induced currents. Why is it that when you stand before a friend whom you know to be selfish and worldly, you instantly have to fight the same temptation in your own heart? The strong current of selfishness with which that life is charged induces a similar current in your own heart for the moment, and you have to fight against it. Just so when you stand before any friend who is pure and holy, and whose purposes are consecrated, there comes into your own heart the induced current of those same holy aspirations. No life is so pure that it does not feel some induced current when standing before that which is base and ignoble, and no life is so ignoble that it does not feel some aspirations to holiness when standing before a life that is pure, and true, and Christlike. I fear that we fail utterly to appreciate the tremendous power of this influence. It is all the more powerful because unconsciously exerted, and unconsciously received ; but every day, ministers of Jesus Christ, what you are, is preaching far more powerfully to your people than what you say. And every day, Sunday-school teacher, Christian in the ranks, whoever you may be, the power of your charac-

ter is telling far more than the power of any words you may speak or write. "Some nameless influence," says Bishop Huntington, "goes out from your least conscious hours that alters and shapes in its little measure every man, woman or child that you ever knew." "If thou knewest," exclaims Richter, "how that every black thought of thine, or every glorious thought, took root outside of thee and for half a century pushed and bored its healing or poisonous roots, oh, how piously wouldst thou choose and think."

Now, dear friends, we are brought face to face with this thought—our responsibility for the influence of our lives. Let the thought come home, first of all, to those of us who are preachers, and then to those of us who are Christians in the ranks. Do you remember the word spoken of Jeroboam? Eighteen times he is referred to in God's Word as "Jeroboam, the son of Nebat, who caused Israel to sin." This is the monument of the man. He goes down through history with that inscription upon him, "who caused Israel to sin." I believe I would rather take my chances with Pontius Pilate in the day of judgment than with that man, the awful influence of whose life plunged a whole nation into sin. And yet there are others in the world of whom it could almost be said, "who caused Israel to sin." Here, for instance, is a business man at the head of a large manufactory. Hundreds of young men are learn-

ing their business methods from him, and are going to reproduce in after-life the induced current of his honesty and Christianity or of his deceit and trickery. He may become the fountain-head of Christian consecration, of dependence upon Jesus Christ, of consecrating all that he has and is to Jesus—the head of a stream of noble, holy living that shall flow on with increasing power as long as time shall last. Or he may be the fountain-head of a stream of unholy business practices that, with increasing width and strength, shall condemn the world forever. Aye, we may think of the responsibility that we have because of our influence. Many a girl has even lost her Christianity, or has lapsed into indifference because the man she chose to marry, like Gallio, “cared for none of these things.” Are there bright, sunny-eyed children looking into your eyes? Are there boys for whom you would cut off your right hand? Know that the fatal influence of your indifference, of your worldliness, will induce a similar current in their young lives, with all the inexorable certainty of this same law in the natural world, and before God you will stand condemned because the shadow that you cast over your children is a shadow of deadly blight and cursing.

Look at Saul the king. He had a seeming religiousness. He goes along with the prophets, and prophecies with the best of them. A

little later we find him at the altar offering sacrifice in the place of the priest. A little later we read of him going to Samuel and saying, "I have obeyed the commandment of the Lord my God." There is seeming righteousness. The man is all right in what he says. He is all right seemingly at first in what he does. But there was a flavor about that man's life that cast a deadly shadow over the whole nation, and Saul's life ended at last in utter darkness, God-forsakenness and gloom. What Saul was, told more tremendously upon the nation than all his seeming religiousness and his gift of prophecy and his work as a priest.

Just so it was with the Pharisees in Jesus' day. They were outwardly religious. There were no such religious men in the nation as the Pharisees; but their lives were rotten and their influence for good was practically void. Oh, my dear friends, does not this thought bring a sense of awful responsibility to those of us who are ministers? What are you in your own secret soul? That is the question. How much of godliness is in your heart and mind?—how much of real Christlikeness? It is not the gift of eloquence that is going to tell in your preaching; it is not any gift, great or small, that you may have; it is the power behind your life. The shadow of that life is going to be a deadly blight and curse to the people that look up to

you, or it is going to be full of blessing and helpfulness and inspiration to those same people. It is the induced current of our lives that is going to tell; and sometimes, when we look back upon our preaching and see how we have flattered ourselves that we were covered with a sort of official holiness—that we were clad, as it were, with high-priestly garments that hid the deformity underneath, so that our people did not know how weak we were and sinful and full of worldly ambition and aims, and have thought that our service could be blessed of God even if we were weak and unholy and sinful men—sometimes, when we have thought such things and expected great fruit, we have seen that our ministry was absolutely fruitless. Then, perhaps, God has led us into His secret place, and has shown us that our preaching must not be by the word of mouth alone, but by the holy life behind. “Be ye clean, ye that bear the vessels of the Lord.”

I want to say to ministers that the true blessing of such a conference as this will be the heart-searchings that come from truth like this; it will simply be that you may see any littleness and hollowness and self-glory that there may have been in your life; simply that you may have revealed to you how you have been preaching to the glory of your own name rather than to the exaltation of Jesus Christ. When at last

you come to that place when you see how small you have been, and how the great triumph of prosperity that you have had was nothing, nothing, nothing, and that you may have been preaching against Christ, by living a life that was full of worldliness—when you get down there with a broken heart, then God will begin to lift you up, and the blessing will come down upon you such as you need.

Then some of us are Sunday-school teachers. It is not alone the ministers that need the heart-searching; it is every Christian worker. Perhaps you have thought little about your class; you have given an hour or two a week to the study of the lesson and have prayed more or less fervently—generally *less* fervently—for the conversion of your scholars; but you have passed all the week in pleasure and in worldliness, and you have not lived a life of prayer; and then you go before your Sunday-school scholars and wonder why it is they are not converted to the Lord Jesus Christ. Oh, my friend, would to God you could to-day learn the lesson that what you are has been preaching to those scholars far more than what you say. They do not understand it; they would not say your life was irreligious and worldly, but somehow there is that induced current of your own self-interest, of your own carnal nature, of your own unsanctified, unconsecrated life, that has been casting

its power over these scholars. That is the reason they have not been converted ; and you will not be able to do the real work that Jesus meant you should do until you get right down to that place where you are clean in the sight of God, and where your own glory is not the aim of your work for Him, but the exaltation of the Master alone.

I have sometimes thought that we did not realize how that the responsibility that came over us was somewhat proportioned to our positions in life. Do you remember in the Book of Judges how in the triumph song of Deborah and Barak there was one curse ? “Curse ye Meroz, said the angel of the Lord.” Meroz was not the only city that refused to fight in that battle. The leaders called all together to fight against Sisera, but some refused to help. “Gilead abode beyond Jordan : and Dan, why did he remain in ships ? Asher sat still at the haven of the sea ;” but there is no curse for Gilead and Dan and Asher. But we read “Curse ye Meroz, said the angel of the Lord, curse ye bitterly the inhabitants thereof ; because they came not to the help of the Lord, to the help of the Lord against the mighty.” Why was Meroz different from Dan and Gilead and Asher ? The reason was that Meroz was a city on the hill ; it guarded the pass through which the Canaanites must escape. It was in

the power of Meroz utterly to block the escaping foe and thus to exterminate that enemy of God's people ; but Meroz never lifted a finger to aid Israel. She sat inactive within her own city walls while her brethren were engaged in a desperate and unequal struggle. Ministers of Christ and Sunday-school teachers, you stand at Meroz, at the point of the pass, in positions of immense strategic importance, and God calls you to faithfulness. I believe that you and I are in balances of judgment in which other men are not held. Down from the little cottage, where I have been spending the summer, out in the Sound, there is a lighthouse standing on Penfield reef, and past that lighthouse there pass every night twenty or thirty of the great Sound steamers and other vessels. It is of comparatively small importance, perhaps, whether the light in my cottage window is kept shining, but it is of great importance that Penfield reef light shall never go out. You and I stand in such positions of influence. We are called of God to guide men into light and heaven, and the question is whether our responsibility before God is not greater, more full of awful possibilities than that of other men.

But, thank God, we need not spend all our time upon the dark side of this subject. Some of us have already felt the insufficiency in our own lives. Let us consider, then, for a moment

the secret of Peter's power. If Peter were here I think he would begin to explain it by telling us about the old life he had lived. He walked with Jesus for three years at least, without understanding his Master, for his heart was filled with worldly aspirations. Looking back on those three years I think he would say: "Three times during those years I and the other disciples disputed as to who should be the prime minister in the earthly kingdom that we thought Jesus was about to establish. I felt some way that I ought to be first, because Jesus had said to me, 'Peter, thou art a rock and on this rock will I build My church.' But Thomas and James and John each thought they ought to be first, so we were all the time striving and looking out for ourselves. As I look back upon it I can see how unfaithful I was to Jesus all that time. Some way we did not understand that Jesus was to die; He told us but we didn't really get hold of it. And by and by there came that awful night when, in the high priest's house, I denied my Lord. I went out and wept bitterly; for three days the scalding tears coursed down my cheeks; no man ever went down so near to the depths of hell, or was ever rescued by loving grace as was I. On the morning of the third day Mary Magdalene came to me and she said, 'Peter, the Lord has risen.' I said, 'It is impossible.' She said, 'Yes, Peter; more than

that, too, the Lord wants to see the disciples; the angels told me that He especially wanted to see you.' I said, 'Mary, did He say that, that He wanted especially to see me?' 'Yes, the angel told me to tell you that the Lord wanted especially to see you.' " Then I think Peter would go on and tell about that secret meeting between him and Jesus. I think he would say, "It was so sacred I cannot describe it to you" (for you know it is not given to us in the Word); but I think he would tell how he lay with a broken heart right at Jesus' feet and how Jesus poured out the wealth of His forgiving love upon him. Then I think Peter would go on and point out how Jesus by the side of Galilee, said to him, "Simon, you said a few weeks ago that you loved Me more than these other brethren; Simon, lovest thou Me more than these?" He would tell us how he answered three times, "Yea, Lord; Thou knowest that I love Thee." Then I think Peter would say finally: "Jesus ascended, and we all went back to Jerusalem into that upper chamber, where the Lord had eaten His last supper. It was endeared to us by many a sacred memory, and we went there and waited for the power which He had promised. We thought it would come in the morning and we began to pray, but the power didn't come. We prayed one day, two days, three days, for the power, and it did not come.

One day Thomas arose and said: 'Brethren, I believe the trouble is with me; I do not believe I am entirely cleansed from doubt. I think there is a lot of sin in me, and the Spirit cannot come because of the sin that is in me.' Then I began to see what the trouble was, and I began to see that it was with me, that my own sin had not been entirely cleared away, and I asked the brethren to pray for me. We just went around in a circle, and we stopped praying for power and prayed for cleansing; we prayed that our sins might be revealed and all our defilement might be shown to us and be cleansed away through the sanctifying grace of the Holy Ghost. We did not think much about the power; we were not praying for the power; what we wanted was to get clean in the sight of God, to get the consciousness of defilement away, to feel that we had been cleansed in that precious blood that was shed for the cleansing of sin. By and by—I don't know how it was—but on the morning of the tenth day there came such a wonderful power upon us through the Spirit that He had promised. We had been cowardly before so that we had hardly dared to leave that room, but after that we went out and preached that Jesus had risen from the dead. And with what wonderful power! There were three thousand men converted in one sermon. I don't understand how it was, but ever since,

wherever I have gone, even the shadow that has fallen from me has been a blessing to others. I do not understand what it means ; but the power of God seems to be on me, and it all came when the cleansing of God was made complete in my own heart."

My friends, I have stopped praying first for the power of the Holy Ghost: I would rather pray for the cleansing of God, for the sanctifying of the Spirit, for I believe it is absolutely impossible for the power of the Spirit to come upon an uncleansed life. It seems to me that the first thing that we ministers and workers for Christ need to pray for is that our lives shall be cleansed in the sight of God ; that our hidden depths of sin and shame shall be revealed to ourselves, and then that the cleansing of the Holy Ghost should make clean and pure and ready for the coming of the Holy Ghost in power. I pray always for the cleansing of God ; and the text that has been my inspiration all the year has just been that word from the fifty-second of Isaiah, "Be ye clean, ye that bear the vessels of the Lord." If the cleansing of God comes to us, and we are cleansed from all our self-love, cleansed from all our selfish ambitions and our attempts at self-glorification, there will be no trouble about the power. The Spirit comes first, I believe, in the cleansing of God, and secondly in the power.

Dear friends in the ministry, what we want to-day is first to be revealed to ourselves so that we can see the hidden depths of shame and of self-glory that are in our hearts, and then have the cleansing of the Lord. I know this truth is searching us; and I pray God that it may search us more and more, so that we may see just what we are and every hindrance that there has been in our Christian life, and then that our one prayer may be, "O Jesus, send us Thy Spirit that we may be cleansed and cleansed again."

There is a wonderful opportunity in this truth that comes from God's Word, and that is the opportunity for great usefulness. I do not believe that we have realized the power of the preaching that comes from a holy life; but, my Christian friend, whether you be a preacher or a Christian in the ranks, that life of thine is going to tell its own story to the world that is round you. It makes no difference whether you stand at Meroz or down with Gilead and Dan, whether you are conspicuous or whether you are among the humblest of God's people, the holy life, if you will only live it—the cleansed and sanctified life—is going to tell its own story to the world. The little book, "Miss Toosey's Mission," illustrates the truth we have been emphasizing. A strange little old woman, seventy years of age, heard a sermon by a missionary bishop which

wonderfully inspired her, and resulted in her coming to her rector and offering herself as a missionary to Africa. The rector was filled with amusement that this little, old, feeble woman, seventy years of age, should offer herself as a missionary; but he finally told her that her mission was to stay at home and give all she could to the cause, and by her prayers and gifts try to help the missionary cause along. Most pathetic are the ways in which this dear old lady saves her scanty income for the Master's cause. There is a young Englishman in that village, rich and prosperous, without much religion—a generous, manly fellow, fond of his dogs and horses—and he finds himself often attracted to this quaint old Miss Toosey, at whom all the village is laughing for her strange ways and missionary enthusiasm. One night John Rossiter hears that Miss Toosey is ill, and he goes to see her, and he finds her in tears over what she calls the failure of her mission. She says, "John, my money only counts up a few small shillings, and my influence isn't anything, for the people laugh at me. The five barley loaves and two small fishes that I tried to bring to the Master are all valueless." That night Miss Toosey died, and John Rossiter sat all the next day in that lonely little house with his head upon his hands. There was something in that simple, noble, pure Christian life that touched him; and that night John

Rossiter wrote to the missionary society of the church of England offering himself as a missionary to Africa.

Oh, the power of living your belief, of putting every truth into action and being true to the high ideals of noble, manly, Christlike character ! You may be unnoticed here, the world may not applaud you ; but oh, a life that lives its religion and is clean in the sight of God is ever winning men to God, because it is interpreting the character of God, and stands an object-lesson of the power of God in human hearts. This living of our religion gets larger and larger as we study it, until at last it stands uplifted as upon a mount of transfiguration. Truly this alone is great—all else is small.

Some of us have felt that our speech was weak. We have not the ability to fashion able sermons or to make strong and fervid appeals, and our ministry has been a ministry in humble places always, and we have felt the utter weakness and the insufficiency of it. And yet, my friend, if you could only get hold of this truth—that what we are means much more than what we say, you will yet do a wonderful work for the Master. The thing of foremost importance is what we are before God and before the world ; that is what is going to tell for the Master. Oh, my dear friends, whatever may be your talents, you can have the talent of living a holy life if you only will. May

God search us all to-day and make us to know whether or not what we are is preaching the blessed gospel of Jesus Christ.

Dear friends, have I spoken God's truth? Does it leave us with hearts filled with glory, and exaltation, and joy? I trow not. I would rather that it would leave us with a sense of awful insufficiency; with a consciousness of the sin in our hearts; with a consciousness of the broken consecration of our lives; and I do pray God that His Spirit may come and by this truth search us; ministers first of all. What are we? that is the question. If what we are is doing the great preaching of our lives, what are we? We can never hide what we are under our official character and station. We can never get rid of the induced currents that go out from unholy and unsanctified lives. God search us to-day. O! God, search us, and know our hearts; try us, and know our thoughts, and see if there be any wicked way in us. Bring us down, O! Lord; down at Thy feet; down in broken-hearted conviction of sin at the foot of the cross.

AMEN

"And all the people shall
say Amen."

—Deut. 27: 16 l. c.

Deut. 1: 20

1st day of the 1st month 27th of 5th month

1st day of the 1st month 27th of 5th month

1st day of the 1st month 27th of 5th month

1st day of the 1st month

IV

AMEN

ONE of the most interesting of books is Trench on the study of words. It takes up some of the basal words of our language and traces them to their very foundation and beginnings. It shows their meaning from their derivation. Oftentimes the root meaning of the word has remained unchanging through all the years, and the word to-day stands out with the same noble vigor which it had thousands of years ago. With others the meaning has been softened with the years, or in some cases entirely changed. *E. g.*, the word "let," which in our day means to "permit," in the days of the King James version of the Bible meant exactly the opposite, namely, to "hinder," and it is so used in our present English Bible. So it is with many other words. Their meanings have been altered, softened, sometimes strengthened, sometimes utterly reversed by the usage of the centuries.

I propose for a moment that we all turn etymologists. I want that we should study words, and a single word, in fact, a very small word. It isn't a noun or a verb or even a pronoun. It is

only a poor little despised particle. But it is a particle which is found in the English, in the Greek, and in the Hebrew, and in many other languages. It is used, moreover, wherever the Christian religion has penetrated. It is the word that closes all our prayers. I suppose we have uttered it a thousand times, and yet have never asked its meaning, have never suspected the treasures of thought and purpose hidden underneath this Hebrew particle.

1. The first thing I want you to notice then is the use of this word. A writer in one of our expository magazines tells us there are three different kinds of Amens. The first is the so-called introductory Amen. There are only three instances of the introductory Amen in the Old Testament, but there are very many instances in the New. *E.g.*, all those texts of Jesus where He begins, "Verily, I say unto you," have the Greek word "Amen," which is translated "verily." It is an interesting fact to notice here that these texts in the first three gospels have but one verily, while in the Gospel of John the "Amen" is double, or "verily, verily, I say unto you." No one save Jesus uses the word thus. Not one of the apostles ever says, "verily, verily, I say unto you."

The second kind of Amen found in the Bible is what is called the detached Amen, found in its simplest form in Deuteronomy 27. There are in

this chapter many separate laws given unto the people, and the instruction is for the people when the law is read by the Levites to cry aloud "Amen." This detached Amen is in use to-day among the Methodists and many other Christians who voice their concurrence and assent to any great truth which has touched their hearts in this Hebrew particle.

The third kind of Amen is called the final Amen. We use it at the end of our prayers, but it is very curious that it is almost never so used in the Bible. The vulgate or the Latin translation of the Bible by St. Jerome, which is the basis for the Catholic Bible to-day, has in it two instances where Amen is used at the end of a prayer, but there are no instances in the Greek and Hebrew. It is true that the Lord's prayer is made to end in this way in the King James version, but there is little warrant for it, and it is omitted in the Revision. But it is interesting to know, however, that the epistles end in this way. All of Paul's epistles end with this word which, however, is omitted in about half of the instances in the Revision, also Peter's and two of John's, but not the Epistle of James, so the gospels too, but not the book of the Acts. This is the final Amen.

2. Now let us turn secondly to the meaning. The root meaning, according to this same writer, is stability, steadiness, reliability, truth. It is

found in the north and south Semitic languages alike, and everywhere it has this meaning. Something true, something that can be relied upon, something fixed, immovable. The "Amen" when Jesus uses it, *e. g.*, "verily, verily," means you can build on this truth, and nothing can ever shake it. It is eternally secure. Do you not see there is tremendous strength pulsing in that word? It is only a little particle, one of the smallest and most insignificant parts of speech. But Jesus could use it to build His Church upon, for the root of it means truth unshaken, immovable.

But there is one other meaning which this writer suggests that pulses in the word. There are other particles in the Hebrew and the Greek that mean as much as this thus far, but this Amen carries with it another most interesting signification. The root word from which it comes, means decision also, the decision of the will. Hence there is not only here in this word assent to truth, but above all other meanings, commitment to truth by the full giving of self. Thus Jesus, when He says, "verily, verily," means this, I give Myself as bond for this truth. I identify Myself with it. It is a part of Me. And when the Hebrews of old or the apostles put in this word, it meant, I put a seal here, and I sign in with this truth, my character, my honor, my property, everything I have. I go bond for it. I give myself with it and for it. I tell you,

friends, this Amen with the saints of old and with Jesus, was a tremendously solemn word. It ought to be such a word with us.

Now I have thrown this study in etymology upon the screen in order to point two practical lessons which I want should come with great force to our hearts.

1. And the first is this. There is nothing that this world needs more than the verily, verily, of this introductory Amen. Remember its meaning, the strong, vigorous thought that flows through it from its root, reliability, truth, steadiness, see, too, the personal giving of self, the signing in of character, and honor, and personality, with this verily, and then let me say again that this world needs more than all things else that all its vows and promises and sacred obligations, should be sealed and signed with this old Hebrew particle.

Is there any sin so common to our age as its disregard of truth? We are so ready to enter into obligations, and so weak in keeping them. We make our promises in the business world, in social life, in the sacred sphere of religion even, and straightway forget that we have fixed our names to any obligation. Take at the outset the little promises we make every day, made only to be forgotten, made carelessly oftentimes, without due thought. Character gets honeycombed with insincerity because of them, and we have the pic-

ture of a life rich in promises and exceedingly poverty-stricken in fulfilment. I think there is something most repulsive about such living. It is built upon hypocrisy. It deals in empty words. It is so easy to promise, and intend at the time to keep that promise and yet fail, and before we know it, we have slipped into this unfortunate habit to the loss of self-respect, of character itself, and the confidence of men.

The same thing is true about financial promises. It is startling to see how many men are careless here. I know at times men get to a pinch in the money market, and the extension of credit may be a necessity. But that is not what I refer to. It is rather when such a matter becomes habitual, when one is always living beyond his income, when promises are many, but never lived up to. I tell you that kind of thing hurts the Church and absolutely demoralizes character. Better live in a garret than become a mere promiser in the money world.

Look again at the purposes we form, the vows which we make to ourselves. What bitter stabs our characters get from these vows unfulfilled. How disgusting insincerity creeps in, that kind of insincerity, too, which is most dangerous of all, for it is not the trying to deceive others alone, but the trying to deceive and hoodwink ourselves. We try to make ourselves believe that we are sincere, when we know in reality that we

have trampled down every high purpose we have formed, forgotten all our good resolutions, been absolutely false to our higher thought. Oh, friends, I wish I could make you see the numbing, paralyzing effect upon life and conscience of this kind of living. I wish I could make you to see how the mind is darkened, the will broken, principle lost, and character honey-combed with damning insincerity, simply because of the laxity of men in standing true to their solemn word and purpose.

I have been reading this last week the biography of George Fox, the founder of the Society of Friends. Time and again this old Quaker was imprisoned because of his refusal to take an oath. The oath was in Fox's mind too sacred and solemn a thing for man to take upon his lips, but Cromwell's soldiers, and the Royalists under Charles, found alike that the word of the Quaker was better than the solemn oaths of other men; that when Fox and his followers gave their word, they signed in their honor, their character, their very life, and this world might pass away, but their word never. This is what the world needs, the splendid might and power of truth in the heart which distinguished the Friends of old.

Look, too, at religious vows. It is a holy thing to take the vows of entrance to the Church, the vows to walk with God, to attend the services

of the Church, to seek with all your heart the prosperity of the Church and of the Master's kingdom. But oh, how lightly these vows rest upon some men. Their faces are not seen at the prayer-meeting, their interest never manifested in the work of the Church. I affirm that in matters of religion vows are constantly forgotten and slighted. We give our names to almost anything, but we do not give ourselves. We make the promises, but we do not live them. We are not loth to enter into most solemn obligations, but their sanctity does not make them inviolable. It has come to be almost a national sin in our easy-going Americanism. The most sacred thing in the body politic is the tie and vow of marriage. Yet there is no country in the world where these holy vows are so lightly held and so easily broken. Even the laws and obligations of God rest lightly upon us. The Sabbath is disregarded, and every holy thing spoken lightly of. Whence this moral unsoundness, this light resting of holy obligations upon us? I do not seek to unravel all the reasons to-day, but I do say that something of the explanation of this laxity and looseness of moral obligation, lies in our unfaithfulness to promises and vows.

What I plead for to-day is the verily, verily, of this Hebrew particle. It is signing in of your very life with every obligation, for the giving

of self with your word, for the letting the world know that when you have given your word, your money, your life, your character, your honor, are all sealed and signed away in the bond which that word represents. Let men know as Jesus did that this world may pass away, but your word shall never pass away. Tell men they can build upon it. That it will hold like the granite hills, and let your faithfulness be such and your character that men shall say on the street, his word is a bond with the treasures of Solomon behind it. And then, too, in every engagement you make with God, with conscience, with your better self, let come disaster, fire and flood, and wind and storm, persecution, all the rage of hell itself, do you stand to it, for moral consistency is involved, and not only character and manhood, but eternal issues are in the balance.

Charles Carroll, when he signed the Declaration of Independence, added to his name, "of Carrollton." What he meant was, I sign in my property, my life, my all. Other men have signed such bonds with blood red ink drawn from their own veins. In such a spirit do you treat your engagements with men and God. Aye, with a verily, verily, before them. Oh, how this world needs the truth, the force, the throbbing might of this old Hebrew particle.

Why take vows at all, or ever make a promise, some foolish heart will ask. If you are weak and

small you never will. You will never give yourself to any cause or volunteer for any truth, when it can be avoided. And yet no man can live without entering into obligations. You cannot enter into a merchant's employ but that very entrance places your character under a vow or a promise of faithfulness. You cannot walk before God without knowing that His obligations press upon your soul. Then, too, while character gets a bitter stab from promises unkept, it gets grand stimulus from vows abided by. A promise kept and kept to its letter, kept through difficulties innumerable, gives a solidity and grandeur to moral character. It confirms a man in better things. It stamps him before the world, and what is infinitely more important, before his own conscience as reliable. It enters into moral worth and goes far towards confirming and settling his life. Man, you must make promises and engagements in this world. See to it, then, that you sign in character and honor and life with the bond, and give your whole self when you give your word.

2. But notice, secondly, the other thing this world needs most sadly, is the power and decision of the detached Amen.

The illustration of it is found in the text. The Levites here are reading the law and the commandments of God, and the people respond with their Amen. There are three things involved here, assent of judgment, decision of will, giving of self.

I have been talking pretty plainly to Christians for their faithlessness to vows. Some of you have rubbed your hands, possibly with satisfaction, and said, yes, the inconsistencies of these Christians. I would rather trust a man of the world. I really do not believe you. It is cheap talk, that. Possibly, too, you have plumed yourself and said, well, I may not be a Christian, but I pay my debts, I keep my word. I have the qualities which this Hebrew particle stands for. Oh, my poor deluded friend, let me just show up to you, if I may, the wretched hollowness and sin of your heart.

You hear truth every day, the truth of Christ. You have heard God's truth here, and you have heard it Sunday after Sunday. Have you said "Amen" under breath in the secret chamber of your heart? I know you have at times. I have almost heard it. I have seen it in your face. I have known it in your very actions. Oftentimes you have said, "yes, that is true, I add my Amen."

But how have you said it? That is the question. I have you on the witness stand now, and it is cross-examination. I'll not spare you. I promise you that. Tell me, then, have you murmured your Amen with the full glorious meaning of this grand old word, with assent to the truth, with decision of the will? All these meanings are in this word. I do not wonder your

eye falls, for I know very well how you have said it. You have said it with soft effeminate voice, with momentary assent, as you would answer to a passing salutation on the street. You may have been deeply moved for all I know, the tears may have come, but you said it like a child, like a weakling, and the great, strong, true heart of your manhood has never leaped to utterance in it. You may know something of the introductory Amen. Your promise on the street may be verily, verily, but you have missed the meaning here. The final Amen you do not understand. When God's truth, God's offer of mercy, has come to your soul, when He has said in language which you have heard and understood, "I will ransom thee," you have not been man enough in the holy silence of your heart, with full decision of your will, and the giving of self with the bond, to say "yea" and "Amen, O ! Lord."

Let us stop and go slowly here. We are on serious ground now, and face a question of gigantic import. You think you have said Amen to God's truth. You tell me you accept and believe it all. But I am listening to hear the tones of your voice. This Hebrew particle is peculiar. It has, grammarians tell us, a different accent than any other word in the Hebrew language. It has an accent on both syllables. It isn't Ámen or Amén. It is Ámén doubled accent, doubly emphasized. The accent over the

one syllable is decision of the will, and over the other, the giving of self. I am listening to know whether you have the accent right. The greatest, most momentous question of your soul is, how do you say Amen?

I know very well how you have said it. You have said it without a single mark of accent or emphasis. You have meant by it a weak, meaningless assent of a mind scarcely interested. Do you think that such an Amen has reached unto God? Nay, it hasn't gone deep down to your own heart. Much less has it ascended to the great heart of God.

And can a man say year after year these weak, meaningless Amens to God's truth, and find no penalty at the last? Oh, my friends, there is a sure penalty. I have painted for you the growth of insincerity, of falseness, of weak and unmanly character which comes from the habit of easy promising and quick forgetting. The man who says the verily, verily, without decision of will and the giving of self, without the signing in of all that he has and is, becomes ere long a poor trifler and a weakling to be pitied. Shall not this, too, be the end of the man who trifles with God's eternal truth by a meaningless assent? Yes, and worse than this. The holy emotions once stirred and yet never allowed to overflow into a real decision of the will and giving of self, shall fall back upon the heart to harden there as

molten lava quickly hardens in the crater of a volcano, and your poor heart once so near to God, shall be crusted over with tons and tons of concrete, which at last no fire above or beneath shall ever loosen. If that day ever comes, you have made a ruin in the soul which even God cannot repair.

I watch those shepherds as they kneel before the Christ child, and I hear the word that falls from their reverent lips. It is this same old Hebrew particle, said in tender hush, with holiest giving of their loyalty to Jesus. I watch the wise men, too, as they bring gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh, the customary gifts when subject nations send their tribute to royalty. I remember that these wise men represent the intellect, the highest station, the enthroned power of the world, and I watch and listen, and I hear again this Hebrew word as with the giving of themselves they pledge their fealty to Jesus. Oh, I wonder now whether we too shall bow at Jesus' feet. All God's truth is centered here. You needn't search the world's philosophies to find it. It is here, right here in Jesus, God's perfect way of saving men, and the only thing He asks, is the saying of this blessed word with all its wondrous meaning. Will you say it? And will you sign in your character, your honor, your life? This is all there is to true religion. All God asks is the verily, verily, the decision and

commitment of this old Hebrew word. Could there be a fitter time to voice your yielded loyalty and love than these glad advent days? Oh, while the Christian world is bowing low at the manger crib, and while there bursts upon our ears the angelic anthem, "Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace, good-will to men," let our knees also bow, and with yielded will and giving of self to God, our hearts reverently answer, "Amen" and "Amen."

CHRISTIANITY'S
OBJECT-LESSON

“Forasmuch as ye are manifestly declared to be the Epistle of Christ . . .”

—2 *Cor.* 3:3.

V

CHRISTIANITY'S OBJECT-LESSON

TRUTH cannot easily be grasped in the abstract. Theories go a begging nowadays. Unless hypotheses are enforced by abundant illustration or made amply clear by proof or object-lessons, they must fail of general acceptance. The reason is that the human mind cannot grasp an abstract truth; it must have proof or illustration.

So true is this that education to-day proceeds upon this plan, not of teaching general principles, but of leading the mind through some single object-lesson to the general truth involved. Thus your little one, who would scarcely comprehend the general truth that two and two make four, is easily taught by the two marbles held in each of your extended hands, making four when placed together. The theory that you have some labor-saving contrivance, over which your brain has pondered for many a fortnight, when you strive to unfold it in explanation, meets only cold discouragement, but let men see your truth illustrated in the polished wheels working effectively and smoothly, and instant assent is granted you. Truth abstractly stated can wring acceptance

only from the few. Truth put to the proof and illustrated by object-lessons finds instant recognition everywhere.

Now, this is just the reason why men cavil and stumble at religious truth—it is abstract and seemingly theoretical. If I could present religion to you as a fully proven problem in arithmetic—if by any art or artifice I could make a material thing out of religion so that your eyes might behold it and your hands handle it, and your mind see into its every working, then instantly it would commend itself to you with irresistible power. But on the other hand, when I must present it as an influence from on high working in the heart, as a series of impulses and better purposes, as a law of higher life, I see that my propositions, though they be God's eternal truth, fail of instant recognition, meeting only the vacant face of a puzzled and perplexed heart. Hence Christianity as I preach it to men, as a life-theory, as a formula and rule of action, needs some illustration to bring it home with forceful emphasis. And where is that object-lesson? Some of you are already catching the thought to which I have been leading you. It is the thought I believe expressed in the text. *Christianity's object-lesson must be the individual Christian.* This is what it means, to be epistles known and read of all men. Christianity in theory, in abstract rules

and formulas, is powerless to touch the heart. Christianity, illustrated in a Christlike life, is living, burning eloquence. This shall be our morning thought. I would it might be a life-thought with us. The individual Christian, Christianity's object-lesson to the world.

So then, Christian, when I teach men of this sacred way of life, and they, doubtful of its power, put me to my proof, I must point them to you. You are, you must be, Christianity's object-lessons. There is a depth of solemn meaning in that thought, a leaden weight of responsibility. Your life illustrates Christianity. Christianity rests its claims, its arguments, upon you. It stands or falls with you. Its proven logic is consistent, Christlike character. It can never fail unless its death-blow comes from the inconsistent unchristian lives of its professed followers.

Oh, the power of holy Christian character. No argument takes hold like that. 'Tis worth all the logic of the centuries, all the studied volumes of theology. If argument has won its thousands, character, or the life behind the argument, has won its tens of thousands. I believe it. The strongest argument for Christianity to-day is not its evidence nor its forceful logic, but the power of its object-lesson, of Christianity tried and proven and triumphant in individual Christian life.

'Tis said a Christian minister of rare ability

had among his hearers a learned but skeptical judge, whose skepticism he sought to heal. After many weeks of careful study he prepared a sermon, strong and ably fashioned in its every argument, to meet the peculiar doubts and difficulties of his hearer. He sent message that the sermon of the morrow was meant especially for him. As the morning came and the hour of service fast approached, among other thoughts in the minister's mind was the fear lest a poor and simple-minded Christian, who occasionally intruded his own feeble word into the service, should counteract, by some blundering speech, the full effectiveness of the morning sermon. The sermon was one of rare power and splendid argument and the jurist gave attention to its every word. But at its close the solemn stillness of the church was broken by faltering words from the corner of the church, where this same simple-minded Christian, amid the mirth of some and curious staring of others, with stumbling words and choking voice, was endeavoring to tell what the Lord had done for him, and the minister's head bowed low in disappointment and mortification. That very night a summons from the judge brought the minister to find him deeply anxious and penitent for sin, and as he sought to point him to the light, grateful for what the Lord had done, he said, "Oh, sir, I thought that sermon must move you." "Wait,

sir," said the judge. "I listened attentively to all the wealth of argument in your sermon and laughed in derision. I had answered every argument you advanced before you had even finished it, but when that old man in blundering way told what the Lord had done for him, it broke my heart, sir." The one was Christianity in theory, Christianity in frozen logic, grand and stately and as coldly beautiful as your winter icebergs—the other was Christianity in life—tried and proven in a life-experience, in a heart glowing with the love of Christ. There is no comparison between them—one living, burning Christian filled with the love of Christ is worth a thousand sermons. Object-lessons are weightier than argument. Life has a thousand times more power than logic.

Oh, Christian, the power of that life of yours. It is the proving of the problem before a watching, waiting world. Did you ever think before what it was to be a living epistle—to be Christianity's object-lesson? Christianity in theory men may mock at, but the profanest lips are closed before Christianity illustrated in Christlike walk. They may reject it as an abstract rule of faith, but must honor it when proven in a life. Christianity in theory is impotent and powerless. Christianity crystallized into character has all the gathered power of the tried and proven and eternal truth of God.

But we shall see more clearly the force of a consistent Christian life when we analyze more carefully its power. In the first place, it is the power of truth proven in a life, and in the second place, the power of truth enforced by personality.

I. First, then, truth proven in a life—this thought has already been suggested. Christianity is only one of the many life theories and religions. Other systems of thought claiming equally to be the truth, challenge men's attention. In this conflict of theories, Christianity, like the others, must be tested by its fruits. If another faith builds up better character, solves more satisfactorily the problems of the future, has wider and better sway in human hearts, then beyond question it must take the precedence of Christianity. The test of Christianity is the life it lives. Here its truth is proven. If any other faith can bring God and heaven any nearer or more completely cleanse my heart from sin, I'll seize it as heaven's best gift to man. But tell me what philosophy has a tithe of Christianity's power over human hearts, and in human lives. Christianity is truth tried and proven in the consistent lives of millions who to-day would willingly die for her.

Come then, unbelievers, I point you to the object-lessons. Take Christian character. What other power could change men's lives as you have seen them changed? What other

theory, or rule of life has ever lifted men so that they have risen "on the stepping stones of their dead selves to better things"? This Christianity has done. It reaches down into the very depths of degradation,—it makes pollution to bloom and blossom with purity—and from infamy and shame has builded strong and manly and Christ-like principle. No other force ever did it. No other philosophy can lay its finger on such a long array of resistless proof. Christianity meets you here. She stakes her all upon that issue. Either she is a power in human hearts and lives, transforming, renewing and ennobling, or she is hopelessly and forever a gigantic fraud. She demands to be put to the proof and challenges attention to the character she builds, to the millions of hearts where burns the incense of her offerings. There her truth is tried and proven—proven in life, in living epistles to be known and read of all men.

II. Secondly, the power of Christian life is the power of truth enforced and vivified by personality.

By some divine ordainment, truth, to make its way in the world, must have the magnetism and the power of living personality behind it. No truth ever yet gained dominion until it flashed forth in some life that had been intensely thrilled by it. Mark the history of the great reforms that have rent and torn the world by the march of

their resistless truth. Truth and personality have worked together. The power of Islam was not only in its single truth that God alone is God, but in the intense living personality of that prophet who had made that truth his own. The power in the Reformation was its truth fired in Luther's heart and kindled into flame in the burning words of Knox. Modern slavery met its death-blow only when the truth involved leaped into utterance in the glowing personality of a Sumner and a Garrison. Truth and personality are wedded—either one is insipid weakness without the other. What is personality that is insincere and uninspired by truth? What is truth without living illustration? The carbon loop hangs in your electric light a dull, black and dreary thing, seemingly devoid of force or beauty. The electricity is stored in your dynamo or in your battery undetected and unseen. Separate and unconnected neither the carbon or the electricity gives the faintest suggestion of utility or power, but make the necessary connection and let the subtle fluid with its mystic power charge the carbon, and there flashes out the brilliancy of the electric light. The carbon, by reason of this mystic fluid, becomes luminous with power and usefulness. The electricity finds utterance and manifestation point in the carbon. So it is with truth and personality. Personality is dull and powerless without the truth.

Truth is hidden and unseen without personality, but let the truth charge and possess the personality, and it flashes on the world with the power and eloquence of inspiration. Truth leaps to utterance only in personality. Personality becomes burning eloquence only when inspired by truth.

And this to-day is the power of Christian life and Christian character. It is truth enforced by the power of personality. God does not teach Christianity by the stars. It finds living utterance only in the lives and at the lips of Christians. This is the deep and underlying thought to me within the text. This is what Christ meant when He said, "Ye are the light of the world." The power of Christianity illustrated in life is not alone the power of truth tried and proven, but of truth *manifested* and *vivified* by personality. This to-day is the grandest power on earth. Men put their shoes from off their feet before one, who, inspired and thrilled by truth, is intensely and deadly in earnest. Evil cowers and shrinks away before the eye that flashes the truth and the brow that is illumined by it. Truth, which in the furnace of deep conviction has been fused and forged with personality, is and must be a living, burning power in the world. In this way a single Christian may be like John the Baptist, a burning and a shining light, flashing the truth he lives from every window of the soul. Chris-

tianity is strong in evidence, strong in its object-lessons, in its truth, tried and proven in character, but it is strongest when it flashes out in the glowing personality of a heart fired by deep conviction. Then it becomes a truth incarnate, an epistle to be known and read of men, written in letters of flaming light on the brow and in the speech, on the heart and in the life, "written not with ink, but with the spirit of the living God."

"Known and read of all men." How that thought would startle us if we only realized it. Oh, Christian, the world is watching and watching you. Too often, alas, Christianity receives a bitter stab in your lives. You, perhaps, are unconscious that the world's eyes are fastened upon you. Men may be unconscious that they are watching you—but approach them and they urge the inconsistencies within the Church as fair excuse for rejecting Christianity. I have no words of blame for them. It is fair excuse. If Christianity cannot bring sterling honesty into your business, noble thoughts into your heart, generous deeds into your life—either Christianity is a dead failure or you have experienced very little of it. But you profess it. Men naturally suppose you have it, and reasonably, I say, they cry out against Christianity when they see a compromised honor, a tainted name, a hard and selfish heart, and a character covered with sus-

picion, flaunting the fair name of Christianity. They say Christianity is a failure. I cannot blame them. I wonder often how Christianity can live a single day when put to the blush so often by the lives of its professed followers.

Christianity would indeed sink beneath it but for the true Christian, saintlike characters it builds. Thank God for them. A breath of slander never touches them. Integrity and scrupulous honesty are theirs. They put their religion into their business, into daily life, so that every act is eloquent of Godliness and purity. This is influence that wins the respect of men for Christianity. It is the power, too, that gains acceptance for it. A man once came to Mr. Beecher with some conscience money. "Take this to such a firm," he said. "Once I defrauded them. They did not know. But I'm a Christian now. I must restore it." Mr. Beecher went. It was a memorable scene in the counting-room—the merchant called his partner, put the money, thousands of dollars in his hands, and told him in broken words, "restored because the man is a Christian." There was Christianity in life, in business. Those merchants never knew it had such a power. That living illustration made earnest Christians of both of them.

Let me look into your faces to-day, let me scan your lives. Let me read these epistles. I must tell men to look at Christianity as illustrated

there. I must point to you as Christianity's object-lessons. Which are you, then? Epistles that cast shame upon the cross, that bespeak its powerlessness and utter failure, or do you so exemplify your faith that your lives are eloquent of Christianity's power and life? Which are you?

I invite you now to a new consecration. Look your sins, your inconsistencies squarely in the face, and henceforth in Christ's strength put away from you all that casts shame upon the Cross. Get nearer to Christ to-day in renewed and living consecration. Get His truth within you so it shall flash in every word and deed. Make your life thus not only an object-lesson, but a point of manifestation of Christianity's truth, and then ye shall be lights in the world,—leading men from their darkness to God and heaven,—accomplishing God's purposes in your life by manifesting unto men in your truth-inspired and kindled personality, the eternal truth of God.

ME ROZ

“Curse ye Meroz, said the
angel of the Lord, curse
ye bitterly the inhabitants
thereof, because they came
not to the help of the
Lord, to the help of the
Lord against the mighty.”

—*Judges 5 : 23.*

VI

MEROZ

THE chapter of the text is a song of triumph. It is the victors' joy over the triumph of God's people against one of their deadliest foes. It seems the Canaanites had come against Israel. For many long years they had overridden and oppressed the people. With mighty armies they had desolated the land and exacted tribute. Such was the power of Sisera's armies with their nine hundred chariots of iron and their invincible soldiery that Israel bowed, cowed and helpless for twenty years beneath the oppressor. But at last God's time for deliverance had come. Deborah, the prophetess, and Barak were called to lead the hosts of God's people. On the plain of Kishon the battle was joined. Terrible and bloody was the desperate fight made by the soldiers of Israel against overwhelming odds, but Jehovah God fought for Israel, and ere nightfall the host of the Canaanites, discomfited, routed and leaderless, were flying in confusion before the pursuing and victorious Israelites.

It is the song of triumph sung by Deborah and Barak from which the text is taken. This song is one of the most exalted and beautiful

strains of Hebrew poetry. Elevated in tone, rhythmical in structure and pulsing with the intense and raptured joy of victory, there are very few among the world's best triumphal pæans that can compare with this gem of Hebrew song. "Awake, awake, Deborah, and utter a song: arise, Barak, and lead thy captivity captive, thou son of Abinoam. Praise ye the Lord for the avenging of Israel. Hear, oh, ye kings, give ear, ye princes. So let all thine enemies perish, oh, Lord, but let them that love Him be as the sun which goeth forth in his might."

In the very center of this lofty strain is embodied the bitter curse of the text, "Curse ye Meroz!" It seems that Meroz had refused to help. None of her sons had rallied in Barak's army. While the rest of Israel were bearing all the strain of the desperate conflict, Meroz had sat all inactive with folded arms watching the issue. What rendered the case worse for Meroz was this. It was a city of immense strategic importance. It guarded the pass through which the flying Canaanites must escape. It was in the power of Meroz utterly to block the escaping foe and thus to exterminate this enemy of God's people. But Meroz never lifted a finger to aid Israel. She sat still and allowed her brethren to do all the bloody fighting. Hence the bitter curse pronounced by victors in their triumph song.

My friends, this curse still lives to-day. The village against which it was first uttered is gone, but that type of life and character which Meroz represents is living to-day and living in the Christian Church. Meroz stands for the shirker, for those who hide themselves away in times of conflict, who refuse to bear a hand in the battle. No wonder that Deborah was indignant. In all probability these people of Meroz who in common with the others were to be benefited by the victory, were present in the great assemblage and joining in the triumph song. In fact, always, no people are so ready to share in victory as those that shirk in the battle. Deborah's indignation gathers itself and interpolates into this song of rapture a terrible curse. Here were the bleeding soldiers around her, whose faces were still blanched with the battle and whose aching wounds gave them no rest. No wonder her indignation leaped to emphatic utterance and it was not alone Deborah but God Himself who spoke. "Curse ye Meroz, said the angel of the Lord. Curse ye bitterly the inhabitants thereof because they came not to the help of the Lord, to the help of the Lord against the mighty."

This is the curse against pure inaction. There is not a line in the history to show that Meroz gave any help to Sisera's army, not a line to show that her heart and sympathies were not with her brethren of Israel, of which nation Meroz

was a part. There is no indication that she played the part of traitor. The sin of Meroz was that she did nothing. She folded her arms while her brethren fought. Her warriors remained safe within their own city walls while the rest of Israel were engaged in a terrible and unequal struggle. She committed no positive transgression. Her only sin was her inaction, but this brought her under God's curse. The angel of the Lord speaks against her, aye, the Christ of the Old Testament—"Curse ye Meroz! said the angel of the Lord, curse ye bitterly the inhabitants thereof."

My friends, the Israel of to-day, Christ's Church on earth, is engaged in desperate conflict. The triumph were absolutely certain were it not for Meroz, but the spirit of Meroz lives in the Church to-day. It is to this inactive, forceless discipleship that this truth comes to-day with the impinging power of God's eternal word. Years ago in the days of Deborah it fell under the condemnation of God. It falls under God's condemnation to-day.

It is really a pathetic thought when you think how few are the shoulders upon which the work of the Church falls. Every pastor knows them and thanks God for the small band of the faithful, but who can tell the sadness that comes into the heart of any leader, to see how large a number of God's people have taken refuge in Meroz,

and are absolutely inactive in the hard struggle of the Church. They sympathize in the main with the objects of the Church. They are not traitors to Christ; but either through cowardice or self-indulgence or a fatal misunderstanding of what Christ expects from His followers, their lives are absolutely inactive. They are willing to rejoice in the victory, but will have no part in the fight. Their lives are not flagrantly inconsistent. For the most part their outward walk casts little or no dishonor on the Cross. They may be respected by their fellows and known as Christian men. The single flaw in their religion is its inactivity. They are shirking in the hour of the Master's battle. The thought is not how much for the Master can I crowd into the day and the year, but how little can I do for Him and still be saved. Such a life fails utterly to grasp the Master's conception of discipleship, "Deny thyself, take up thy cross and follow Me." The self-denying and the cross-bearing are left to others. Who shall say, my friends, that such discipleship to-day does not fall under the curse of Meroz.

But do you say this was thousands of years ago and such a curse is not applicable to us to-day? Very well, let me bring you then to three solemn lessons from our Lord's life where the same truth finds emphasis. Look first at the twenty-fifth of Matthew, the parable of the tal-

ents, and see the curse pronounced by Jesus upon the inactive servant who had but the one talent and failed to use it. There is not a line in the parable that suggests any infidelity or sin otherwise than that of inaction, and yet hear the Master's words, "Take the talent from him and cast ye the unprofitable servant into outer darkness, there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth." Can you not hear in these words of Jesus the very curse of Meroz? Look once more and Christ is standing before the barren fig-tree. He looks to find the luscious fruit and finds none, and so He curses it and it withers away. Mind you this is the only miracle that Jesus ever did which was wholly destructive in its nature, and here again we find the curse against unfruitfulness and inactivity. Look still again, our Lord has ascended ; with a last leaning of His heart He bends from heaven to speak through John to the Churches. This is the last word of the Master to His Church found in the book of Revelation. Hear those words to Laodicea. She is not charged like Ephesus with cherishing heresy, nor like Pergamos with holding the doctrine of Balaam, nor like Thyatira with adultery and fornication, nor like Sardis with defiling her garments. None of these fearful sins are chronicled against Laodicea and yet the bitterest curse of all is pronounced against her. "I know thy works, that thou art neither

cold nor hot ; I would thou wert cold or hot. So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of My mouth." Yes! as something utterly loathsome and nauseating. That is what the text means. What is it but the echoing of the curse of Meroz against lukewarmness, against inactivity, against the shirker and deserter from the battle of the Lord.

But I want to narrow down the meaning of the text. There was one thing that added much to the sin of Meroz—viz., *its strategic importance*. It stood at the head of the pass. It could have weighed more heavily than any other city in that day's battle. It was this fact that added to the enormity of its sin.

My friends, some of you to-day stand as Meroz in strategic positions. God has placed you at the front. Your position is that of leader in your little circle. Your influence by reason of wealth or education, or family or talents overtops that of those about you. If so, you stand like Meroz in a strategic position and the special word of the Lord calls you to faithfulness. Now to make this thought perfectly plain let me say, that *men*, in distinction from women, hold strategic positions like Meroz. I do not undervalue the work and influence of Christian women, but the men are the molders of public opinion and stand at the forefront of every social and political

question. A Christian woman can do much in the battle of the Lord, but a man with equal consecration can do immeasurably more. His influence reaches further. He stands upon the hill, at the very head of the pass, with power to turn the tide of battle for the Lord. It is the men that stand at Meroz, and it is especially to them that this truth comes to-day.

And do you say that men do not stand in strategic positions? Look at the family. Whose influence there is going to make that home one in Christ? Whose duty is it to stand like Joshua and cry, "As for me and my house, *we* will serve the Lord"? Is it the Christian mother? Too often, alas, you men at Meroz leave her to fight the battle all alone. That mother can hold the girls, perhaps, true to her early teaching, but what of the boys in the home? The tears may fall upon the little cradle face as she consecrates the little one to God. She may teach the little lips to say "Our Father," and watch and pray that the child may be led to the Master, but by and by the age of restlessness will come, the wild dreams, the mad ambitions, the growing irksomeness of restraint, and will that mother's prayers and tears hold the boy? The boy cries, "My father is no Christian." And now behold him in the madness of his wild dreams breaking over every restraint, going further and further astray, plunging to his ruin, and why? Because,

fathers, you who stood at Meroz, had not the courage to rise to the full height of your manhood in those ringing words of Joshua, "As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord." Your lips never taught that boy of Jesus. You had no family altar, you never prayed with him. Where does the responsibility of that ruined life lie, with the tearful, agonizing, praying mother, or with your own hardened and insensible heart? It seems to me, never does the curse of Meroz come with such hissing fury, as when it falls upon those men who hold a strategic position in their own family, and yet who leave all the anguish of the battle to the praying wife and mother standing at their side. The saddest spectacle my eyes ever rest upon is that of a Christian mother praying and weeping and straining every nerve to train her little ones for God, and yet fettered and hampered, aye, and often checkmated by the open indifference of the man who stands at her side, whose attitude puts into eternal peril not only his own soul, but the souls of those little ones who look into his face and call him father. "Curse ye Meroz, saith the angel of the Lord, curse ye bitterly the inhabitants thereof, because they came not to the help of the Lord, to the help of the Lord against the mighty."

But again men hold strategic positions in the Church and in society. They are the natural leaders in the world—the fighters in the great

arena of common life-effort and struggle. The world looks to them for leadership and guidance, and they hold the power to turn the tide in every battle, to shape the destiny of every great world movement. Their position gives them inestimable advantage in the struggle against the enemies of Christ. In truth, they stand at the very head of the defile, able, if they only will, utterly to exterminate the enemy. And yet, when I look from the watch-tower to see how goes the battle, I find that the fighters on the plains, who are engaged in most desperate conflict, are for the most part the mothers and the wives and sisters, while the men are safe within the city walls of Meroz, plying their busy trades or bound up in their selfish interests, scarce giving a thought as to how the battle goes. Oh, men, standing on the mountainside with power to block the enemies of God, what trumpet call shall rouse you to a full, brave stand for Christ? Some of you are in the thick of the conflict, fighting manfully for Christ, but far too many lips are silent, far too many lives inactive, far too many in those city walls of Meroz. How shall ye escape the curse for the shirker? "Curse ye Meroz, saith the angel of the Lord, curse ye bitterly the inhabitants thereof."

But notice again, there are others, men and women both, who, by reason of birth and social station, hold peculiarly in the relations of life

to-day the same position that Meroz held of old. While there is perfect equality before God, and all of us stand upon absolutely the same level in the Christian Church, yet beyond question, men whose talents and station have made them leaders in the world's movements, ought to be the natural leaders in the Church. There are some among us to whom God has given great gifts. Have we learned the lesson that great gifts bring great responsibilities? I have often dwelt in my own thought upon that repentance at Nineveh. It began at the highest—it began with the king, and the very repentance of the king led all the people to repentance. If that repentance had begun elsewhere, it would never have gone through and through the city. My friends, men follow their leaders to-day. It would seem to any one of thoughtful mind that those persons whose lives had been just crowded with mercies, who had every comfort that the world could give, would have hearts wondrously tender under all God's mercies. You would think, too, that those whose social prominence lifted them above the fear of criticism, and whose profession possibly fitted them for public speaking, would be the most fearless witnesses for Christ in the prayer-meeting. In fact, you would naturally expect that the more prominent one was in the world, and the wider his influence there, the more heavily would he weigh in the Church. But is it

so, my hearers? Is it true that you members of the Church, with unquestioned leadership in social matters, are equally the leaders in the spiritual life of the Church? You ought to be—your lives are placed at Meroz—at the very holding point of the pass. You have by reason of your very position immense strategic power. If you would throw the whole weight of your life earnestly on the side of the Master, your help would count amazingly for Christ. But if you abide at Meroz, and take no part in the battle, what think you, will the angel of the Lord speak in that last great day of judgment?

Yes! Great gifts bring great responsibilities. God holds wealth, ability and social power and prominence to strict account. The measure of responsibility increases with God's gifts to us. Some of you, by reason of this wealth and social prominence and talents God has given you, stand at Meroz. You have immense advantages over others of us who hold no strategic point of influence. The world is waiting and straining its eyes to see what part you are taking in the battle. Will you lay aside the pride of life, the baneful self-indulgence that is almost sure to spring in the midst of honors, and throw all the splendid forces of your manhood on the side of the Master? Or will you remain within the city-walls of Meroz all inactive, shirking in the day of

the Master's battle, and by that very inaction challenge the eternal curse of the Son of God?

There is thrown about all high position an air of privilege. I do not think that high position demands it for itself—but rather it grows up in the universal deference that the world pays to it. A man high in worldly station is released from many obligations that fall upon the rest of us. He isn't expected to conform so rigidly to the laws or customs of the world; and transgressions against them are excused or overlooked. It is this very air of privilege, oh, men of high position, that constitutes your deadliest temptation, for no privilege can clothe your shoulders in the presence of Almighty God. The world may demand less of you, but *God demands infinitely more*. In proportion to His gifts to you, must be your service unto Him. Great gifts bring great responsibilities. The man that stands at Meroz, at the entrance of the pass, is being watched by Israel and all high heaven. Whitherward will he turn his face and how will he use the strategic strength and power that God has given to him? God Himself is watching and holding him to strict account.

But I am not willing to leave you here with any narrowed application of the truth. Meroz stands for the shirker wherever and however conditioned he may be in life. Enlistment without

service, profession without sacrifice, receiving from the Church and giving back no service to it—that is Meroz. How many of us are living within those city walls—watching the battle, but bearing no hand in it—busied with our other interests, careless of the dangers with which Israel is beset, enervated in the privilege and ease of our luxurious lives. In these days of special labor, when men are waiting to be saved, and when a hushed and burdened sense of God rests upon us like a cloud about to break, in these days of renewed earnestness and consecration, when the battle is joined anew, O! ye men of Meroz! bear a hand for Christ. There are joys in the victory that await you. The raptured ecstasy of Deborah is not one whit beyond the joy that comes to every laborer for Christ. If you want real peace to go thrilling through that life of yours, if you want to know what Christian joy is in its highest and best experience, if you want the bounding rapture that pulses in this triumph song, go ye then to the work for Christ and throw every energy on the Master's side. *Be dead in earnest* just for once, all aroused to the very depths of your manhood. Then there will come a joy you have never felt before, a fullness of joy and blessing, which shall open wide your lips in triumphal song. And God grant that your triumph song may have no curse in it—for let there be no Meroz—not one shirker among

you—not one in all your number, who in the day of the Master's battle, shall refuse to come to the help of the Lord, to the help of the Lord against the mighty.

ENDLESS
LIVING

“The power of an endless
life.”

—*Heb. 7 : 16.*

VII

ENDLESS LIVING

WHAT shaping power over life, what influence upon the thought and action of every day do the ages to come exercise? Is it true that you and I are living with one thought only, the thought how life to-day will influence life to-morrow? How the Endless Existence of the soul will be shaped and determined by the deeds and the thoughts of to-day? We have many cant phrases about it, but tell me, how much does it really enter into your buying and selling, your common thought and action? We all know very well that with the great majority of men it has far too little influence upon life. I sat the other night and heard the testimony of twenty or thirty men at a rescue mission, who told the simple story how their lives had drifted aimlessly, carelessly, unwittingly into evil courses; how that they, with the shortsightedness of youth, had never stopped to consider where the end would be, until they had awakened from their dream of sin to find character gone, health gone, reputation gone, everything gone, with nothing left but ruin. This text came to me then with overpowering force.

I said I must preach upon it. Not only drinking men, but other men, high in the scale of life, are living just as these men have lived, with utter disregard of the future, bound up only in the present. Would that the power of an Endless Life might come to them and shape and point and guide the present life of to-day. There is no truth that needs emphasizing more to the absorbed life of to-day than the power and constraining influence of Endless Existence.

Now, I want in the first place, that we should learn the whole lesson of our morning thought from the viewpoint of endlessness. I want that we should get out of the ruts of our thinking, and away from the common every-day lines of meditation, in broader and wider realms. And to do this I must first take death out of life. Let me ask you to suppose then that there is no such thing as the phenomenon which we call death, that life goes right on forever here on the earth, that we are not to count the years by threescore and ten, but by millions and millions of ages. Let us believe for the moment that this world to some of us is going to get better and better until it is really heaven; and that to others of us this world, or some part of it, is going to get worse and worse until it is our hell—and that we need not think of death at all, for we are going to live on, and on, and on forever. Now I want you to

start out with this conception for two reasons, because it will add vividness to our thought, and because after all it is the true conception of life. Death is a sleep, that is all. It is like the child who for the first time closes its eyes in this world. It will surely wake again and life will go on. What a mystery sleep would be to us were it not so common an experience. The only reason death is a mystery is because it comes only once to a life. But the truth is, it is only a little sleep by the way, and life goes right on. Let us think it for the moment for it will emphasize our morning truth.

And now, in the second place, I want to take time out of life and put eternity in. In other words, I want that we should try to grasp for the moment the thought of endlessness. I think I can best illustrate it by asking you to go with me for a moment in a flight through space, so that we may get some conception of infinity. It seems to many of us a long way across the continent, five weary days by fastest train, three thousand miles and more. But that is only a very small part of the journey around the world, twenty-five thousand miles. Look up again some beautiful moonlight night to yonder moon which seems so near. Two hundred thousand miles she is from us. Look at the sun, which in the day of summer heat seems so near ; ninety-one millions of miles away. Go on the wings of thought to

yonder planets that are flying with us in maddest flight through space. Enormous are the distances which separate us. The astronomer Herschel said, "Place the sun here in the center, two feet in diameter, and the relative dimensions and distances of the planets are as follows: Mercury, a grain of mustard seed, at a distance of eighty-two feet; Venus, the size of a pea, one hundred and forty-two feet; the earth, another pea, two hundred and fifteen feet; then Mars, about as large as the head of a clove, three hundred and twenty-seven feet; then Jupiter, an orange, two-fifths of a mile away; Uranus, a plum, three-quarters of a mile; and Neptune, another plum, one and a quarter miles away; and as for the nearest fixed star, that would be somewhere near Australia."

Look out upon the splendid constellation Cassiopea which seemingly circles around the Polar Star. Do you remember the little star in the corner of the chair? Astronomers tell us that it is one of our nearest neighbors. But that star as you see it to-night is as it really looked nine years ago; for such is its enormous distance that the light which will reach us to-night has been on its winged flight through space for nine long years. Other stars are nearer, but from the nearest star the light in its darting flight must travel from three to five years before reaching us; and, mind you, light flies

nearly two hundred thousand miles a second. It girts this globe eight times in a single second. Look again at the North Star. Forty years it takes for that light to reach us ; and, mind you, these are among our nearest neighbors. Some stars are so far away that it takes thousands of years for this swift darting light, which girts the globe eight times in a single second, to reach us. Astronomers tell us that our sun is only a little ball compared to some of these stars which shine with twelve thousand times its brilliancy. In the milky way we are told there are three hundred million suns. When we dwell upon thoughts like these, how insignificant a speck is our poor little earth, and how mean an atom in God's universe are these bodies of ours. These flights of fancy, as we scale the sublime distances of God's universe, though they pierce to the outer realms of space, even then they have not compassed or comprehended infinity.

So it is with eternity. Scale the distances of time, your years, the century, the Christian era, eighteen long and weary ages, the long flight of years since Abraham, since Adam 6,000 years ago ; nay, far back through the hundreds of centuries of geologic history. Add to this the future. Let imagination fly over time with the darting power of light. Pile century upon century, age upon age, through long processes of computation, till reason loses its balance and

imagination can go no further, and you have not traversed a handbreadth of eternity. Eternity, weight that word if you can; put your planets, your stars, your universe into the scale pan and take the weight of that word eternity. How the flitting moments of the threescore years and ten shrivel up into utter insignificance when you stand face to face with eternity.

The power of an Endless Life. Pardon me if this computation has seemed childish to you. I know of no other way to lift our thoughts anywhere near to the stupendous meaning of Endless Existence.

I trust you have followed me thus far and have had your minds broadened and uplifted and solemnized by the thought. We have taken death out of life and time out. There is no death, and life is endless, absolutely endless. Now, I want that we should take up finally, the relations between the present and the future, and view them in the solemn, holy light of these truths before which we have stood.

I. And first then the relation that the present bears to the future. Can a man be anything he wants at any time? Can he live the meanest, wickedest kind of life to-day, and then change absolutely and live the holiest, purest, heavenly life? Is there such a thing as absolute freedom of will, absolute ability to change life and character as we will? No one will say

that there is. And the reason is, because the past and the present have a causal relation to the future. They shape the future, determine it absolutely.

Trace the history of character as you see it illustrated all about you. Here is a man of well known generosity and nobility of soul. Can you imagine that that man could change and become all at once low and stingy? No, you say, his present character is sure promise of the future. And again, if a man is close and small and full of littleness and meanness, do you expect after ten years' absence to find him changed into just the opposite? No. His present character is the promise of what his future will be. In my early life the boy that stood closest to me was careless, reckless, with a good deal of bravado which occasionally got him into trouble. I met him the other day after twenty years of separation, and I found him just the same exactly. His old time characteristics had gotten him into a world of trouble. And he had not changed. His life had been restless and stormy. He was as a man just exactly what he was as a boy. And as I looked into his face again with real sadness, for our earlier lives were knit together as were Jonathan and David's, there came over me the overwhelming consciousness of the truth which my father was wont very often to impress upon my mind—that the

boy is the father of the man. Now that is only the same truth as this one which I am trying to emphasize, that the present stands related to the future with all constraining and determining power. Character tends to permanence. As Solomon puts it in Ecclesiastes, "The thing that hath been shall be, and that which is done is that which shall be done."

In the year 1865 a great flood swept over the valley in which I lived. At the foot of the hill where our own house was, there was an orchard of young and thrifty trees. The flood swept over that orchard and many of the trees were killed. There was one I remember which was bent over double almost to the ground. It was thought that tree would die, but it was left for the time, and soon new life appeared upon it; and when at last we tried to straighten it, it could not be done. The roots had taken strong hold, and the trunk had gathered stiffness and strength, and to-day that tree stands with its ugly, misshapen form growing in a horizontal direction. So it is with men and women here in this world. Let early life assume a given direction from purpose or drift or accident, and let that life grow on for a year or two; and then the character is fixed, the life direction determined forever, the destiny practically sealed. Only God can change it. The roots of character have gone down into the solid earth. The trunk has

stiffened and solidified into stanchest timber. Character will continue to grow ! *Yes, but it will keep to its bent.* It will always lean in the same direction. It will go further and further from the perpendicular. No training of later years can ever undo the unfortunate tendencies of early sin.

It makes my blood run cold to hear some men talk so lightly about young men sowing their wild oats. It seems to be a fashion to excuse such sins and pass them over lightly. But, young men, remember that the impress that they leave upon character will last forever. The direction they give to life will never be wholly changed. The scars they leave upon the soul will remain there through eternity. The sins may be forgiven through the mercy of your God. True purposes in life may be afterwards gained through redeeming grace ; but the *moral curvature and distortion* will always stand out in your life history.

Yes ! if we could have done with the past entirely and put it forever away from us, that would make the problem of character and salvation vastly easier than it is. Sins can easily be forgiven. These alone are the smallest difficulty. The history can be blotted out. But the tendencies of sin, the habits of life which those sins have caused, the direction which they have given to our growth, these are the momentous

questions which crowd upon our thought. The future looks bright and promising when you view it alone. It is all radiant with hope and promise and the possibility of better things. Yes, when you view it alone it looks thus, but man, you must *count with your past*. You must reckon with settled tendencies and habits and life directions and life motion which has gathered tremendous power already. You are not going easily to change. There is precious little hope that you will be radically different from what you are. There is absolutely no hope in yourself. "As the twig is bent the tree is inclined." "What thou hast been and what thou art," says the philosopher Seneca, "such shalt thou always be hereafter and forever."

II. And now, in the second place, let us turn to consider influence of the future upon the present. We have seen how the present and the past shape and determine the future. Can the future react upon the present? Can there not come a holy influence from the contemplation of its destiny, which shall be all controlling upon us now?

Yes, this is the very meaning of the text. The power of an Endless Life. It ought to hang over us, and shine above us, as a guiding star. All that we do should have relation to this never ending future. The power of the Endless Life should be the arbiter of every act and motion of our souls.

Look now for a moment for a long, long view down the ages of Endless Living. Take death out and time away, as has been suggested. Let your life go on as it is moving to-day, with all its marked tendencies getting stronger, its habits firmer, its life direction more and more fixed. Are you satisfied to have it thus, no change ahead, no relief from the dominion of the sins which drive you now, only increasing madness and unrest? Take the long view of life. We are so short-sighted here. Men will look ahead in business. A man will dwell in the center of Africa for years to accumulate a fortune with which to spend a future in luxury. Constantly, in things temporal, we make present sacrifice to gain future good. Not so much so in the matters of the soul. Endless Living does not enter into some of our thoughts as a shaping power at all. We refuse to think about it. It is a mystery. Ah, but take a long view to-day. Remember that the same laws of character which hold to-day will always hold. If life motion and habit and direction get fixed here, they are fixed for the Endless Living. Character goes on the next morning after the sleep of death just the same. There is no hope that it will change over there. It is just the same as if there were no death. And the question for you to ask yourself, and to answer, is, could you bear it if the Endless Living should be only what life is

to-day, simply with marked tendencies of life growing stronger all the time? Could you bear it, friend? To have all the deep unrest of soul intensified a hundred times as the ages fly on? To have the evil passions now dominant, rule with ever increasing rage? To have the hopelessness of life grow darker and blacker with eternal despair? Could you bear it, friend, you who have no Christ? Why in your short-sightedness have you never thought of these things before? This is men's punishment, this to my mind the very horrors of hell; simply this, that life goes right on as it is to-day, but it goes on forever and forever and forever. All things change not. To be sure the good and true and those who love the Lamb, are taken aside somewhere and are by themselves, and they go right on in their upward way, every holy impulse becoming holier, every joy and pleasure adding to itself new joy, every throb of peace giving witness to added rest and bliss, life going on and on and on, in upward and holiest direction, until confirmed in holiness as the angels in glory are confirmed. Then all evil falling away, then the soul, unfettered by its sin, lifted to new activities and freedom in its blissful immortality. No darkness then, no sorrow, no pain, no tears, no mystery either; for to our awakened souls the life of God shall be understood, and His universe the playground of our raised spirits. This is Endless

Living. This the eternity of the saved soul. Its glories no eye can see, nor can any tongue give witness. They have not as yet entered into the heart of man.

I have simply been trying to lift this truth out of all the cant and worn and trite words with which it is so often clothed, so that the power of this Endless Living might break in upon your hearts and lives. I think it is a tremendous truth, that the life to come is just the continuation of the life here. It is simply the waking after the sleep of a single night, and all (and this is the startling truth involved), and all the tendencies and habits and life motion and direction, go right on and on and on forever. The saved soul shall indeed be saved from its sin miraculously. The sanctification begun shall be finished. But with him who has no Christ, no power of God in his life, all things shall continue as they are, only with every life motion growing stronger and every passion increasing its grip and hold, until the soul is bound forever in its deep unrest and evil.

Paul says, "We look upon the things unseen." Would that you and I could gaze with long and thoughtful vision there too. What folly it is to live with any other thought, for we know, we must know, if the Bible did not teach it, our own hearts would teach the lesson, that the life to-day shapes, determines, fixes forever the Endless

Living. God forgive us if we have been thoughtless of these things. God grant that the power of the Endless Life may work hereafter in us. Endless! Endless Living! The wonder is that it does not enter to control every thought and purpose. I want that the power of the Endless Life shall come to me and come to you.

And the one lesson it will teach is this, that Endless Living is safe only in the Christ, that its mystery is all solved there, that it need have no terrors to the child of God. For "He is able to keep that which we have committed unto Him." May the power of the Endless Life break in to-day upon your soul and lead you straight to the Lamb of God. Yes, there is mystery here. But this one thing is true. Long after the stars have ceased their silent cycles, you and I shall live either within or without God's home, either in the world of sin or the heaven of holiness. Those whom the Christ shall know shall be with Him, those whom He hath redeemed and saved from sin. And this, too, I know, that whoso believeth on Him shall never be confounded. Endless Life! Endless Life! Oh, may its power break in upon your soul to-day to lead you to full surrender and implicit trust in Jesus.

THE COERCIVENESS
OF THE PAST

“Pilate answered, What I
have written I have writ-
ten.”

—*John 19:22.*

VIII

THE COERCIVENESS OF THE PAST

“**W**HAT I have written I have written,” said Pontius Pilate to the Jews, who came to ask him to change the inscription above the cross. He meant that it was too late. The writing had been nailed to the cross. It was gone beyond recall.

“What I have written I have written,” echo our hearts, as we look back over the struggle we have made for character. The past with its history of failure or success is gone, and it is gone beyond recall. It is written in the lines of history, which the world can read. It is written in the good or evil that lives after us. It is written in the grooves upon the minds and hearts which those actions have carved. It is written in wood, hay, stubble, or the gold, silver and precious stones with which we have reared our building. It is written, too, in God’s great book of record, the pages of which can be scanned at the judgment day.

With Pilate it was purposeful action. It had been done designedly. I have always felt that it was Pilate’s confession of faith. He would not change it if he could. He had no desire to

change it. Is it so with us? Has the record of the past been only the outcome of carefully formed purpose, and does it match what we had laid out for it? Alas, with some of us it is a nightmare, the memory of a mad dream. The past has no comfort for us. Few of us can say the text understandingly and thoughtfully without a tremor—"What I have written I have written."

I. The first thought which the text throws into bold relief is the unalterableness of the past.

Who is there who would not, if he could, blot out many chapters of his life and forget many scenes, the memory of which gives him the keenest pain to-day? But they are gone—not gone from memory, would they were—but gone beyond our power to change them. Thoughtlessly we did the deeds. Without aim or purpose we drifted into such and such courses of life, thinking little of what was involved. And now we would give our fortunes to change the record. It can never be done. The past is written, written in the lines on the face and character, written in the good and evil that live after us, written in God's great book of judgment.

And closely allied with this thought of the unalterableness of the past is its irreparableness. The harm done can never be repaired. The sin may be forgiven but its consequences remain. I remember in my boyhood days to have been

much troubled by the story of the boy who was told by his father every time he sinned to drive a nail into the door-post. Soon the door-post became studded with nails. Then the father told him every time he did a good act to pull one out. The thought touched the boy and he changed his life and by and by the nails were all withdrawn. He called his father, and there stood the door-post with the history of his sins, for although the nails had been withdrawn the scars remained. My hearers, grace can take the nails out of the past, sins can be forgiven, all the guilt removed by the blood of Jesus Christ, which cleanseth us from all sin ; but not even the gathered might of God Himself can take away the scars. They are there forever. Into my hand in early life I thrust a knife. I bear that scar to-day, though the accident happened many years ago. Here in my heart and on my character I made a stab of early sin. That scar too remains. Oh, these scarred lives and characters of ours. The whole history of the past is written in them. If we could see into each other's souls (thank God we cannot), we could read with unfailing accuracy from the scars upon the character the whole history of the past.

When John Randolph lay dying he said to an attendant, "Bring me a card." "And what shall I do with it?" "Write on the one side, 'John Randolph,' and on the other side the word 'remorse.' Put it into your pocket and when you

want to know what best symbolizes the soul of John Randolph, take it out and look at it." We may not know remorse just as he knew it, but have you never in a smaller way, uttered some words, written a letter, performed a deed which you would have given your right hand to recall? Oh, the endless difficulty in hasty, ill-considered action! All of us are spending time and thought in trying to atone and make amends for the mistakes of the past. The consequences may be mitigated but the sin can never be recalled. It has entered into history. It has entered into character. It has entered into other lives than ours. It never can be altered. Is there a more solemn text in all the world than this, "What I have written I have written"?

Take again the thought of opportunity. Herein is the secret of much that is good in life. The seizing of opportunity tells more than all things else on human character and happiness. Sins of commission are bad enough, but I have sometimes thought that sins of omission were worse. Look at the opportunities that come to us every day. Here is a young man in his school life, the lessons that he is to master then, if he neglects to learn, can never be repaired. The discipline that school life gives, if shirked and avoided, can never be made up in after life. So to every age there are given opportunities, which if neglected, are gone forever.

There is something tremendously solemn to me when I stand before a life just passed, and see how large has been its opportunities for being helpful in the world, and see also how those opportunities have been wasted. The same thing is approximately true when I look back over a year of life. Here is a soul which I might have led to the Master. Here is a young man whom I might have saved from the love of drink. Here a sorrowing one whom I might have comforted better than I did. Have you never had such thoughts? But these opportunities are gone forever. They are gone beyond recall. In the matter of opportunity, "What I have written I have written."

Lift this thought a little higher. Look at the opportunities to turn to God, which have been yours through every moment of the year that has just passed. Some of you are still indifferent: still holding out against God. You have said, "Some time I will come," but there you are, still undecided, still waiting for you know not what. The opportunity to turn to God has passed, and your continued rejection has entered into judgment. Not the great sins of your heart are to be your condemnation at the judgment, but the fact that you had the Christ offered you and deliberately refused Him, that shall bring God's wrath upon you.

Oh, friends, to learn the deep and holy signifi-

cance of what we call Time is the greatest of life's lessons. No other approaches it. To learn this is to master all the others. "Have you ever seen," says Robertson, "those marble statues fashioned into the fountain, with the clear water flowing out from the marble lips, or hand, on and on forever? The marble stands there passive, cold, making no effort to arrest the gliding water. So it is that Time flows through the hands of men, swift, never pausing until it has run itself out, and the man seems petrified into a marble sleep, not feeling what it is that is passing away forever. And the destiny of nine men out of ten accomplishes itself before they realize it slipping away from them, aimless, useless, until it is too late." Is there any lesson which we need to learn so much as the deep, holy, awful, desperate meaning of this swiftly gliding Time.

II. But let us pass on to a second thought, which to me is still more momentous—the coerciveness of the past. The thought of the irreparableness of the past is certainly one of great solemnity, but what about the irreparableness of the future? What I mean by that is, that the past coerces the future, constrains the future, makes the future. To express the truth in the words of the text would make it read thus, "What I have written I shall write again."

There is a tendency in every one of us to

repeat the past in the future. Unless there are other influences of great power at work, we are sure to perform any act or think out any line of thought in the same way that we did it before. We are ever automatically repeating the past.

In my earliest school life I remember to have had a seatmate whose name was James Hill. It was at a time when I was endeavoring to improve my penmanship. I remember that he was always practicing upon my name and I upon his. Thirty years have passed since that time, and to-day that boy has drifted so far out of my life that I doubt if I should know him if I met him on the street, and yet there is such a coerciveness in the past, that whenever I take up a new pen to try it, I always and invariably write James Hill, James Hill. I do it unconsciously. Take another illustration. In my college days I wrote an oration upon the building of character. I worked upon it many months, gave to it much thought and labor, and now to-day whenever I take up that old subject of character, my mind begins almost before I know it to reproduce that old line of thought. The truth is, these minds of ours are like the phonographic rolls. There are little indentations, or channels, or ruts, call them what you will, which are made upon them by all our past experience. When you turn the roll for another year the song that comes out from it is the speech of the past. Hence it is

that the present is ever repeating or reproducing the past.

Yes, my friends, if the past could stand alone by itself, without any coercing power over the future, that would be one thing. It would make the whole problem of character and salvation vastly easier than it is. But it cannot stand alone. One of the most awful, momentous truths that concern us here, is the dreadful coerciveness which the past exercises over the future.

We know what this experience is. Perhaps there is one who has tried to break away from some sin. The power of that sin lies in the fact that it has become more or less a habit with us. We know too well then what the coerciveness of the past is over the future. The past has stood over us like a tyrant, forcing us against our will and against our conscience to do what we would fain flee from. We have struggled against the sin. We have cried to heaven for help. Have fought it with the energy of despair. Often we have triumphed, but ever again the power of the all-constraining past would rise up like an invisible army and force us almost before we know it to repeat the history of the past sin in the present. The thought then has not been the sin and guilt of the past ; that has perhaps all been forgiven in the mercy of God ; but rather the despotism of the past ; its coercing tyranny, its vice-like hold, and its all constraining grip on the future.

Do you talk about the freedom of the will to a man who has lived for fifty years? It is all nonsense. Theoretically he is free. Practically he is bound hand and foot by a thousand chains. Practically he is an absolute slave, serving a master, and that master is his past. Let him get away from his past if he can. Let him change his long fixed habits of life, his habits of thought, his trend of character, and he will find himself as helpless as the clay in the potters' hands. I know that he himself has made the chains that bind him, has himself molded in early life the plastic character, which has now hardened into flint. He has indeed created the very master whom to-day he serves like a driven slave, and yet, nevertheless, he is helpless as a child. Only God omnipotent can save him.

Have you ever read "John Inglesant"? It is the story of a man who was trained by the Jesuits. In his latter life he saw the error of those things which he had been trained to count most dear. Then comes the struggle of John Inglesant's soul between the new-found faith and the past training. The novelist has depicted with marvelous fidelity to human nature the struggle in that soul. On the one side, a mind convicted, reason satisfied and a conscience demanding change. On the other, the coercions and the restraint of the past. Notwithstanding that his reason and conscience, every argument

that he could advance, urged him to break away, he remained true to his early teachings. John Inglesant was a slave. He could not free himself from the tyranny of the past.

I am sure that this thought does not enter into life computations as it should. We live careless of its deep and solemn meaning. To me no truth has greater import. "What I have written I have written." Nay, infinitely more awful than that, "What I have written I shall write again."

It seems to me that this truth ought to throw into very conspicuous emphasis the danger which surrounds men who have lived for a half century without accepting Christ. Is there any chance that they will ever accept? Humanly speaking, no. Their past indifference shall ever constrain and coerce them. With every added month of life it has grown in its tyrannous power. Humanly speaking, there is no probability that they will change at all save to become more and more confirmed in all the now well established habits of life. Joseph Parker of London, says he "despairs of a man after he is forty." Before that age the past is persuasive, urgent, always seeking control, but without the gathered power of later years. Hence it is that men in early life come to change their lives for Christ more easily. Childhood has no past. With youth it is not the coercing power of later years, but with the middle and declining life the past has the ac-

cumulated strength of Hercules to force its tyranny upon the soul. Humanly speaking there is little hope.

But oh, my hearers, we need not "speak humanly" in matters of the soul. There is a divine side. And that divine side is the persuasiveness and power of the Holy Ghost. My grandfather was a courtly English gentleman. He lived for seventy years an attendant of the Church of England. But never in all those years had the power of God touched his heart. That life seemed crystallized in its solid indifference and unresponsiveness, but at seventy years of age the power of God came down upon him, and that old man came into the kingdom like a little child. The most tender, touching things I ever heard, were those blundering, broken prayers which he used to say at his family altar and the grace at his table. For seven years he lived a Christian life, a life of very great beauty and Christliness and earnestness of work. I well remember how he sat in the church when I was examined for permission to preach the Gospel, with his heart in his throat and his cheeks wet with tears. It was the crowning joy of his last year of life, that one whom he had loved and one in whose veins ran his very blood, should preach the Gospel. It was his hope that he might be spared long enough to hear me preach. Once he heard me, and then God

took him. And I feel to-day, that among the many holy and sacred influences that surrounded my ordination to the Gospel ministry, and that have ever followed like a benediction, are the saintly, consecrating prayers of that dear old Christian heart.

Oh, strong men, who have lived for half a century and have not yet made decision for the Christ, humanly speaking there is little hope. The power of the past indifference will surely constrain and coerce the present and the future. From the tyrannous grip of the past there is no escape to be found in human power. What you have written you will write again till the end of time. But oh, there is one hope. Over and against the coercions of the past I place the power of the Holy Ghost. Against human conservatisms I pit the power of heaven. Although fifty, sixty, or seventy years have passed of rejection of the Saviour, and though your soul be to all human sight crystallized into obdurate and seemingly eternal indifference to God, yet if you will let the power of God work within your heart, it will break to pieces the hardened insensibility and make you like a child in Christ. It seems to me that this truth ought to warn you to have a care. The time of opportunity is nearly past. Shall its record be the tighter gripping of the past upon you, the further fixing of your soul in its fatal unresponsiveness?

Or will you then, in the power of God, break with the past to-day, and, by the help of the Holy Ghost turn your heart in childlike trust to the Master? God grant that this may be the history of this hour, and may God forbid that in the lives of those who know not Christ, that the sad and implied prophecy of the text shall ever be true: "What I have written I have written."
"What I have written I shall forever write."

IN THE STOCKS

“ Who having received such
a charge, thrust them into
the inner prison, and made
their feet fast in the
stocks.”

—*Acts 16: 24.*

IX

IN THE STOCKS

ALMOST every man has his feet fast in some kind of stocks. There are some restricting circumstances to his life which hold him fast, hindering and crippling his action. These stocks which hold men's feet are as varied as the phases of life are varied. With the one, ill-health constitutes the stocks which fetter and condition his success; another, financial embarrassment may hold; another may be in the toils of faulty and insufficient education; another may have something in his individuality which restrains and hinders his usefulness. Thousands are the stocks which hold men's feet, shutting off their freedom, hindering their activity, taking the heart out of men and crippling their life-work.

Possibly you think I overstate the difficulties in which most of us are entangled. Very well, let me throw myself upon your experience for proof. Are there many of us who do not feel that our life-work is fettered and narrowed by some restricting circumstances? Are there those among us who have never sighed to be free from some network of harassing

restraint? Nay, rather have we not all cried out "Were my feet only free from these grievous stocks that hold them then I should succeed." I believe I am speaking a practical but almost universal truth when I say that men are constantly fettered and hindered in their different lines of action by embarrassing and crippling conditions. Almost every man has his feet held fast in the stocks.

Now when we turn to look at the influence of this almost omnipresent fact we see or think we can see at once its power. The man who is crippled by ill-health, by poverty, by misfortune, by ignorance, or whatsoever else, must lose heart and courage in the race or battle of life. The consciousness of his own weakness unnerves him. He is apt to forget that his competitors have disadvantages also, and so his own spirit fails him. Thousands are the men whom we see on every side of us, lying back upon their oars just because every favoring condition does not surround them. Beyond a question the moral influence of these hindering conditions in life must be enormous. I say moral influence—I mean by that the influence upon a man's spirit which comes from the consciousness of weakness, of poor equipment for any work. The lack in equipment may not of itself be a fatal barrier to success, but if its reflex influence unnerve a man and break his spirit, then failure is certain.

The stocks, then, in which our feet are held, are they entirely to fetter and cripple our life? That is the subject of our morning thought. Are they to hold us in vice-like unbending mastery, paralyzing our energies and making a farce of all our labor? Is our life-work to be absolutely conditioned and shaped by these chance restrictions that happen to bind our feet? If so there is precious little hope for some of us. Our lives are doomed to failure from the very start.

I want to lay down a single proposition at the very outset. It is this, that men have succeeded despite the stocks that held their feet in cruel and painful mastery. Here are Paul and Silas. You scarcely would expect that much could come from aught that they might do in that prison in Philippi. They were heavily conditioned for any great results. In the inner prison, with their feet fast in the stocks, who could expect much of them? But note the result, the prison doors were opened, the jailer and his household converted, and the very rulers of the town came to them in beseeching, supplicating tones bidding them depart. We will enquire later how it all came about, but it is sufficient to notice now, that great and mighty results came from the work of men whose feet were fast in the stocks.

Now look about into the world and into his-

tory. Will you be surprised when I tell you that almost every great reform has come from the work of men whose feet were all entangled? That governments have been founded, new religions started, streams of civilization turned from their channels and the very faces of the centuries changed by men who were fast in stocks of some kind?

Look into the history of Paul, for example; we know there was something in his personal appearance unattractive, even repulsive. He says of himself that his presence was weak and his speech contemptible. There was something in his face, probably a defect in the eyes, or facial distortion of some kind, that made him repulsive to men. This may have been the thorn in the flesh he asked should be removed. We catch glimpses here and there how exceedingly sensitive Paul was concerning it. And yet despite such a restriction and embarrassment the work of the Apostle Paul stands out as the monumental wonder of history. There is Martin Luther, too, whose name stands next to that of the great apostle among the uncanonized heroes of faith. A poor miner's son; that is all—unknown, without friends or backing, crippled by his poverty and social unrecognition. And yet this miner's boy, fast in his stocks of poverty and social insignificance, set all the world ablaze and humbled to the dust the proudest hierarchy that had held

the world in its sway. John Calvin's work was performed in weariness and sickness. Through bodily ills innumerable, though scarce able to do the labor of one, he did the work of many men and gave to the world a system of thought, which as the historian Froude says, has absolutely dominated in Western civilization. Do you say that stocks and restrictions and obstacles are fatal barriers to success? Nay! I point to the examples—the men who have made the history of the world are men who have had their feet fast in the stocks.

Yes! the power of imperfections—that is the thought. Perfect equipment does not win the battle. Burnished steel and showy uniform are not sure promise of success—not the heavy shot or the powder behind them, but the unconquerable spirit behind the powder, that is what wins in the battle of life.

Here is a man with every surrounding favorable, with intellect, means and influence, with most perfect equipment for success, whose life miserably fails, and here is another fettered at every step in his pathway, fighting his way with an unconquerable spirit to noble ends and glorious victory. Sometimes it seems as if perfect equipment were misfortune, for it seems to lack the spirit of victory as if it trusted to the shining steel rather than to the sturdy, all-conquering heart behind it, and it seems again, too, as if

courage gained an impulse under embarrassments, as if the heart grew stronger when the feet were in the stocks. The most effective work round and round the world to-day is done by crippled men—men who have labored against embarrassments and obstacles and restrictions of every kind. And yet with these crippling circumstances of life, such has been the all unsubduable heart behind, that every opposing obstacle has been unhinged and every fetter broken and mighty results effected, as if the same mighty power had gotten utterance that broke the doors and loosened the stocks at Philippi. Let the feet be fast in the stocks. The wrestle of life is with the arms and the all-unconquerable heart behind them.

Now when we look at the Christian Church, we find that this same truth gets emphasis there. The men that are most useful in the Church are the crippled men. You would expect in the Church, at least, the men who were the most useful would be those who had culture, perfect education and abundant leisure for Church work. In short, according to all human judgment, you would think that the best equipped men would be the best soldiers. But is it so in the Christian Church? Nay, rather, is it not true that there are many of us men, who by education, by social position, by natural abilities, by freedom from restricting circumstances, are fitted to be most

effective workers in the Church, and yet who are not weighing a single ounce in the spiritual work of the Church ; while others, whose lives are conditioned on every side, by restrictions of business, of education, whose feet are fast in the stocks, are mighty factors for Christ and for the Church. It is a sad satire upon one phase of life, that when we ministers want volunteers for Christian service, we have learned enough of human nature to call upon, not those members of the Church who naturally seem the best equipped by reason of leisure and culture, but rather upon the man who is crowded by business, and whose feet are fast in many entanglements. He is the man who can be depended upon. I tell you that men with feet fast in stocks have made the history of the world. Men with feet in stocks are to-day making the history of the Christian Church.

A single inquiry remains. Men hampered in the stocks of life and men unhampered ! What philosophy shall make our lives weigh the most and tell the best ? We shall find our answer here in this incident of Paul and Silas.

1. And the first way is by contentment in our stocks.

Paul and Silas had a hard night of it in that prison at Philippi. Those heavy wooden fetters bound their feet, and yet the record tells us they sang praises. I like that picture, songs in the night, a dark night too, a night of pain and

weariness, for remember they had just been beaten with stripes. Their swollen ankles and bleeding backs were strange setting for a song, and yet, these two disciples were contented, joyous even unto singing in their stocks and stripes.

If there is one phase of character more unfortunate than another, it is that of discontent. It is so much easier to bewail our misfortunes than to make the best of them. And yet if we are to make our lives count effectively, the first thing we must learn is to be contented in our stocks—to accept, like Paul and Silas, all the unfortunate restrictions with which God has loaded our lives, as His own wise plan for us—to merge our constant sighing and whining and pitiable discontent into a brave and manly resignation, “Oh, Lord, Thy will be done.” It is the heart that has courage enough to accept the situation without repining, and manfully to make the best of it, that is going to win and find its way out of its misfortunes. We all have our restrictions and embarrassments from which we cannot tear ourselves. The first inexorable condition of success is contentment in the stocks which God has sent to us.

2. The second condition is this, we must use those stocks as a stimulus and inspiration.

It is evident from the whole trend of our thought that the primal condition of an effective

life lies in its spirit rather than in its outside setting. Men have put to absolute defiance the obstacles that filled their pathway and carved success from the very stones that blocked their footsteps. It is the resolute will and unconquerable heart that win, and such a spirit will win, even though every energy seems embarrassed and crippled by perplexing restrictions. And it is this kind of a spirit that rises with danger and grows sublimely resolute in the presence of new embarrassments. Paul and Silas had preached with earnest vigor that day in Philippi, but the highest flight of those lofty spirits was in that prison song. Their very stocks were like fuel to kindle their courage into flame. Their misfortunes and stripes, their writhings in pain, were only the minor strains to round into fuller chord and harmony their song of triumphant faith.

I tell you, men, hampered in your work for Christ by restrictions and limitations and fetters, you must get an inspiration from these very obstacles that will whet courage to the keenness of Damascus blade and call into vigorous action every throbbing energy. No man ever yet succeeded who did not at some time contend with mighty obstacles, and gather courage and inspiration from each successive victory. We put forced obstacles in our way to develop physical strength. The dumb-bell that must be lifted, the

bars to be vaulted and the ladder to be climbed, are all real obstacles we use to develop strength of arm. So God puts embarrassments, networks, restrictions, and stocks to hold us, in order that the spirit within us, the spirit of our manhood may grow and develop in manly power. This is the reason why men who are so splendidly equipped fail—because no giant obstacles stand in their way to call out and develop all their hidden strength. I had almost said a man must have his feet in stocks, to have his life count most effectively, for those very restrictions may be inspiring stimulus to the purpose and spirit of his life.

3. But there is a third condition here. That is, we must act to the very limit of our freedom. Let us go back to Paul and Silas. There was very little they could do for the Master in that inner prison. But what they could do, they did, and they did all that they could. They prayed and sang praises. They acted to the very limit of their freedom. They used every power that was unfettered. It seems a very little thing which they did. Some of us would spurn to do so small a service—*we* want to do such *grand* things for Christ—but mark what came of it, the prisoners heard and God heard, and when the prison was rocked the jailer heard and the town council heard and the world has heard that song which shall go rolling on to the very end of time.

All these mighty results came from acting to the limit of their freedom.

I have seen a sick chamber where a silent sufferer bore all patiently and uncomplainingly and with Christian resignation her pain. I have heard such a sufferer bewail that her feet were held so fast in those stocks that activity in the Master's service was denied her, and yet I have known that from that chamber went out a silent power and influence which seemed vastly to out-measure the power and influence of any other Christian—a power which shaped and ennobled men, which lifted them to God and heaven. My friends, do we think that in our peculiar restrictions we can do nothing for the Master? This picture of Paul has its answer for us. We are only to act what we can. If our feet are in the stocks of sorrow, suppose we too, like Paul in the triumph of faith, should sing songs. Those other prisoners might hear and be comforted. Have we too been snubbed in the market-place, felt the lash of the world's proscription? Never mind! let us pray and sing praises, do all we can for the God that loves us and for the world that hates us, and God shall hear us and His thunders shall shake the gates of our prison and men shall bathe our stripes with ointment. Are our feet fast in the stocks of any kind, let us pray and sing praises, let us work for Christ to the very limit of our freedom, and men shall stand before us

crying, "what shall I do to be saved," and we shall carry at our girdles the key that shall unlock the gates of the Celestial City to some weary, foot-sore traveler. Have we too been thrust aside by the cold world into the inner prison of social unrecognition? Let us not deny our Lord, for He at least is near us, but let us pray and sing praises and the world itself shall come to loose our bands and learn of Him whose name and wondrous love we sing.

Oh, Christian, I am not concerned that your voice should fill the world, but I want you to make that inner prison of yours, that little circle in which your restrictions have imprisoned you, to resound again and again with the name and the love of Jesus. If you fill that inner prison to which your stocks are holding you, you will be doing all God asks of you. If you make that sick room to be radiant with a Christlike patience, your influence will touch the stars. In the stocks and harassments of business you can pray and sing praises by letting your unswerving justice be a prayer for justice and your blameless righteousness a praise to God. Though unknown and a stranger, you can fill even that prison house with the spirit of the Master, at whose touch the doors shall tremble. Whatever be our sphere, however small, however fast our feet, if we only live and act to the very limit of our freedom, doing *all* we can for Christ, then God

Himself will come to us and the stocks will loosen and the prison doors drop off and our poor weak human insufficiency be made sufficient unto mighty result. For God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the mighty, and the battles of His kingdom are fought, and shall always be won, by those servants of His whose feet are fast in the stocks.

Yes, dear friends, most of us are held in the entanglements of some cruel restriction, but are we contentedly and bravely getting inspiration from them? We are shut into inner prisons, but are we filling the prison house with song and gladness? Our feet are fast in the stocks, but are we living and weighing for Christ to the very limit of our power and freedom? These are the questions that our thought leaves with us. May God help us to answer them.

DECISION

“I will arise and go to my
Father.”

—*Luke 15 : 18.*

X

DECISION¹

NO man can see the whole horizon at a single glance. His back will always be turned upon some arc of the circle. So no one can grasp truth in its entirety at a single view. He may face one side or phase of it, but there are always other sides of it which will be behind him.

This is the reason why the Bible is so full of half-truths. You can never crowd the whole horizon into a single photograph. In the chapter from which the text is taken, you have glimpses in these different parables of different arcs of the same great circle of truth; but no one of these parables presents the truth in its fulness. The truth brought out by the whole chapter is that of God's part and man's part in salvation. But notice how, in the first parable of the shepherd seeking his lost sheep, that God's part finds full emphasis, while man, pictured in the straying sheep, although he has a part in his own wandering away, has no part in his own salvation. In the second parable of the woman and the lost piece of silver, the view is restricted

¹ Preached in Marquand Chapel, Princeton University.

to a still narrower arc of the circle ; for here, while the Father's patient and tender seeking after the sinner and the joy when he is found, are pictured, the sinner has no part either in his being lost or his being found. But in the third parable of the prodigal son, the other side of the truth is brought out ; for here it is the sinner who wanders away, and who at last returns to his Father. The pivotal thought of the parable is represented in the text : "I will arise and go to my Father." Here we find most beautifully pictured man's part in his own salvation, a truth of deep and solemn import, which, I trust, I may be able to impress upon your hearts.

In a single word, then, man's part in his own salvation is *Decision*. He must arise and go to his Father. He can never drift to heaven or dream himself into holiness—but manly decision is the foundation of true religion. It is the very warp and woof of it. Christianity isn't feeling alone, it isn't a tabulated creed or peculiar manner of thinking. At bottom, it is decision, deciding for Christ, saying the "I will" to the Master.

I. And now, in the first place, as we consider this truth, I want to say that God has done *what He can and all that He can for us*.

He gave us first the law written in our hearts. The philosopher Kant said : "There are two things to me sublime, the starry heavens above

and the moral law within." I think every one who has pondered long upon the mysterious revelation in our conscience has felt, also, the sublimity of its teaching. Clear and loud above all the din of the world voices sound the "thou shalt," and the "thou shalt not," of conscience. In every crisis of our souls we have that voice to warn us and that light to guide us. Socrates conceived of conscience as an attending spirit, whispering always in his ear what he should and what he should not do. To every heart that voice speaketh. The way of truth and God are made plainer than the day through its mystic revelations. "It is the light that lighteth every man that cometh into the world," a light so clear that Paul says, the heathen having this law written in their hearts are without excuse for sin. In the soul of man are the stars of God's eternal truth. They are set as surely by the hand of God as Arcturus and Orion.

But notice, that in addition to the law written in the heart, God has given us also His blessed Word, and there the "thou shalt not" of conscience is expanded into that matchless decalogue. These ten commandments, too, are fortified by other legislation, and all these laws of God are illustrated and emphasized by the history of a chosen people recorded for our instruction. When Israel was obedient to God, prosperity always crowned her; when she wandered away

from His commandments she always met adversity. Besides this instructive history written for our guidance, we have the burning words of inspired prophets, sometimes thundering God's condemnation against sin ; sometimes in great tenderness reaching out unto disobedient people the offers of God's eternal mercy. The rich, deep experiences of the human heart when distressed by sin and comforted of God, are given to us in the poetical books of the Bible. Marvelous light is thrown upon our duty as sons of God ; and the way of salvation in this wondrous book, which God has given us, is revealed so that all can understand it. To run in the way of God's commandments we only need to hide His Word in our hearts.

But more than this, God has done for us. By and by there came the incarnate Jesus unto us. God sent to us His dearly-loved and only begotten Son. Arm in arm He walked with vilest sin. From the lowliest He never turned away His face. All misunderstood even by His chosen ones, peculiarly alone, He walked all that long and weary way from heaven to Calvary. His feet were pierced with the stones and thorns along the way. His heart was torn with many a sorrow. Yet with a majesty of patient suffering He endured the infidelity of friends and hostility of foes, until the gathered rage of earth and hell crushed His life out on a cross. Why should

Jesus come to earth? Why the incarnation in human flesh? Why that life of self-denial, pain and suffering? Why the garden tears and the blood-drops of Gethsemane? Why the scarlet robe, the buffetings of men, the crown of thorns, that awful death on Calvary? Why the patient bowing of the head and baring of the breast to all this storm of bitter rage, when twelve legions of angels only waited all impatient to do His bidding. The answer is written on every page of the Bible; it was to save the soul of man from sin. There is no spared treasure in God's house. Heaven gives its only Son to die for our salvation.

But in addition to all these, there is also the gift of the Holy Ghost. Jesus sent the Holy Spirit unto us, and to-day He is in the world working in the hearts of men, bringing to our remembrance the things that Jesus said, taking of the things of Christ and making them plain to us, convincing us of our sin and our need of a Saviour. I can understand something of the Father's love to us. It is explained somewhat by the analogy of an earthly father's love towards his children. I can understand Jesus' love, for He is to us in truth an elder brother; but the love of the Holy Ghost is all inexplicable to me, for it comes to us after the Father's love has been spurned and the love of Jesus trampled in the dust. For here right on the ruins of the scorned, rejected,

trampled love of God the Father and God the Son, the Holy Ghost erects again the open gates of mercy, and renews with importunate and pleading tenderness the offers of salvation. Again and again the Holy Spirit pleads with you. And although to His continued and patient knocking, knocking, you cry, "What, still there?" Although you say it year after year, with a purposely, resolutely barricaded heart, yet He stands to-day pleading just as tenderly with you to be reconciled to God. Oh, the majesty of the divine patience!

All this God has done for us, and for our salvation. And now I ask has not God done what He can, and all that He can; what more could you ask of God? Would you have more laws written in our hearts, more of the "thou shalt not" of conscience? Would you have more written decalogues and histories of transgression, more thunderings, more pleadings inspired of prophets, more earnest warnings and tender words of mercy from the lips of those who speak for God? Would you have another Holy Ghost coming to bear witness for Jesus, more pleadings of this Spirit, more patient waiting at the fast-closed door of your heart? Would you have more suffering of the Son of God, more lonely walks amid the sin and sorrow and misunderstanding of an earthly life? Would you have more jeers of mock tribunals, more buffetings and scourgings,

more betrayals and denials and forsakings, more crowns of thorns, more Gethsemanes, more Calvaries? I say what else could God have done for your soul than He has done? It seems to me that heaven has reached the limit of its power in its agonizing effort to save men. God has done what He can and all that He can for us.

II. And now, in the second place, I want to place over against this thought another momentous truth: That our wills can defeat all God's purpose for our salvation. My friends, I think we dwell too much in our abstract thought upon the omnipotence of God. I believe God's omnipotence even is checked and sometimes checkmated by the will of man. God never does violence to human freedom. If you put the dilemma to me that if God will and cannot save us, He is not a God of power; if He can and will not, He is not a God of love; I take the first horn of that dilemma, I believe that God will, but cannot save us. This truth I read on many a page in the Bible. I read that "God is not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance." This truth is emphasized time and again in God's word, in the seeking of Christ, and in the work of the Holy Ghost. I read it in the lowly life of the Master and in that awful death on Calvary. The great agonizing desire of God's great heart is that all men should be saved. And yet not-

withstanding all this we know that some are lost. Why? Surely not because God decrees it. Such theology I repudiate with sevenfold indignation. Nay, but rather because there is power in the human will to oppose and block the very will of God. I bid you to look at that picture of Jesus stretching out His hands to that city Jerusalem, and crying, "Oh, Jerusalem, Jerusalem, how often would I have gathered thee together, but ye would not." See in that pathetic picture of the great heart of Jesus breaking with its longing to save, how that the very will of God Himself is defied and broken by the will of man; and then know, my hearers, that the one thing only that causes silence and sadness in heaven, that brings sorrow to the great throbbing heart of God, that ruins our souls forever, that gives pause and check to omnipotence itself, is that awful, fatal "will not" of the human soul.

I tell thee, men, I am free. God will never do violence to that freedom. This limitation may be self-imposed, but it exists; my puny will can condition God. I can put the razor to my throat if I will. I can end my life in yonder ocean. I can blast it with vice or bless it with virtue. I can lift my soul to God and heaven or plunge it to the depths of a bottomless hell, and neither God nor man, things in heaven or things on earth, can hold me or coerce my soul

one whit beyond its willing choice. Herein lies the mystery of my probation ; I am the carver of my own destiny, the architect of my own eternal fortunes.

These eternally solemn truths ought to throw into bold relief the central thought which I wish to emphasize, that all the further responsibility of your salvation rests with you, and with you alone. God has done what He can and all that He can. He cannot force you into the kingdom, you alone can and must decide the issue if it is ever going to be decided. The text indicates how that decision can be made. It is by arising and going to the Father. It is by making a manly decision for the Master.

III. And now notice in the third place the excuses and reasons in the human heart for not deciding.

Here is one. Some of you do not feel your need of Christ. You are moral, clean and manly young men. Your honor is unquestioned among your fellows. You know that your lives so far as outward appearances go are every bit as pure and free from sin as many a Christian life. What need have you therefore for the religion of Jesus? I recognize the difficulty in meeting such a thought as this. I know that you moral men are the hardest of all to reach with the Gospel. I know that oftentimes the world's moral men seem more consistent in outward

life than the Christian. Yet, I believe there is a real difference between them, but that difference is a difference lying in the heart behind the life.

For example, take the illustration suggested by Professor Drummond. Suppose I hold in one hand a beautiful quartz crystal, and in the other an acorn. There is no comparison between the two as regards beauty. My crystal is many times more beautiful than the dull and shapeless acorn, and yet if I put the crystal through all the processes in my laboratory, I can make nothing else out of it. It returns at last to the same six-sided prism. But if I put my acorn in the ground, by and by there arises the majestic oak. The crystal has reached its highest development. There is nothing beyond for it to attain to, but the acorn is only the germ of what it may be. Now this is the difference between morality and real vital spirituality. Morality has reached its best development upon earth and oftentimes is far more beautiful than spirituality. Ah, but it doth not yet appear what spirituality shall be. It is only in the germ here. By and by in the world to come, compared to what it is now, it shall be as the majestic oak is to the dull and shapeless acorn. Do you compare morality with spirituality? Remember you are comparing the dead crystal with the living seed—the one is dead, the other has life abiding in it. “He that

sion, and a promise. The other boy comes in and begins to blush the moment I speak, and before I am done with my statement the tears start and he says, 'Father, it is true, and I am ashamed of myself. I did what I am accused of and I am thoroughly sorry for it.' Now, I want to know, which of these brothers has acted the most manly, and which gives token of the greatest moral health? And yet there are many persons who think there is a great advantage in being put into a cauldron of conviction and bubbling and boiling and stewing there, and that they are good Christians just in proportion as they are mean and refuse to submit to magnanimity and honor and manhood."

No! my friends, it is all wrong that a man must wait for feeling or certain experiences to be a Christian. I believe that Christianity at bottom is decision. It is manly purpose. It is taking stand resolutely for the Master. I like to look upon Christianity in the light of business principles, and to feel that this eternally important step for each one of us to take can be taken by a simple manly decision for Christ. I have no great respect or admiration for a religion that is founded on feeling. I do not believe that emotionalism is true Christianity. I have often seen this kind of religion, now filled with rapt ecstasy, now walking high above the stars in the enraptured joy of its faith, and then again, in a

moment of coldness, I have seen it plunged into the very depths of despair and doubt and tossed about by much temptation ; and I have thought how uncertain and unstable a thing such a religion is. And then again I have seen a religion founded upon resolute decision. It had no transports of joy as the other, but it held its way steadily onward into increasing peace and satisfaction, and with an unswerving steadiness amid all the storms of sorrow and temptation truly sublime. And I have thought to myself, would to God there were more of such religion. That alone will be faithful unto death. Such faith as that will hold its own through all the storms of life and all the shock of ages, enduring, unchanging and eternal.

Religion is loyalty at bottom. The warp and woof of it ought to be decision. Feeling is the tissue woven in with the warp and woof. With feeling only, the fabric is weak and unsubstantial. It is worthless and shoddy. First and foremost put decision into your religion. I like to see a religious life begun not in times of revival, but in a quiet, manly decision now from this time forth to serve the Master—that man's religion is going to last forever. Give me a faith crowded to the full with manly decision, a religion with lots of the "I will" in it.

IV. And now fourthly and finally, I ask you to make this decision now.

And in the first place, because failure to decide is to decide for Satan. It is of inestimable importance that we should understand how, that in the matter of the soul, inaction is fatal action and indecision is in truth decision. Satan has the advantage over Jesus, because one can drift into his kingdom; but to gain the kingdom of the Lord Jesus, one must pull hard against the current. The largest number of those who are lost, are lost through this fatal indecision. Not one of the long list of the damned ever chose Satan freely and deliberately; their choice was made just as some of yours are being made by inaction and long delay, until the hour of choosing God was past. My friends, you cannot dream yourselves into holiness or drift into glory. Remember, remember that in the solemn question of the soul, inaction is fatal action, indecision is the decision of doom.

But notice again your power to decide is diminishing. Suppose I take a magnet in my hands. Here are some little tacks. See how they cling about my magnet by the forties and fifties. And here again suppose some larger ones. Not so many now hang upon the steel. And here are some shingle nails. Perhaps a dozen now are lifted, but only a few six-penny nails, still fewer of the eight-penny. Here is a spike. I can lift one end of it, but before I can lift it all from the table it has fallen from my mag-

net. Just so it is with the grace of God. The little ones come easily. Childhood is all defenseless against heaven, but it is harder for the growing boy, still harder for yonder man just crossing the threshold of manhood. With every added year the weight of sin increases, and harder is it for the grace of God to draw the soul to itself. By and by such may become the weight of sin that omnipotence cannot move it. Yes, my friends, it is vastly easier to come to the Master now, than by and by. Childhood is the open door, youth the closing gateway, manhood the barricaded entrance. Not long ago, in a company of Christians, where more than a hundred were gathered, we took a ballot. It was found that three-quarters of them had been converted before twenty-one years of age, and nine-tenths of them before twenty-five. It is a momentous truth that the chances for conversion in after life, young men, decrease inversely as the square of the years. You know how insurance companies calculate in cold blood the probable years of a man's life. I can calculate, in the same way, the probabilities as regards your eternal fortunes. Are you nearing the age of twenty-one and have not as yet yielded unto Jesus? The probabilities are three to one that you will never yield. Have you passed the age of twenty-five and are still unsaved? I must tell you, then, that according to the sternest arithmetic, the chances are ten to one that you

will be lost forever. You know how plastic the child nature is. It is harder to change the habits of youth. Life settles still more into fixed grooves in early manhood. It is easier to-day to turn to God than it will ever be again. I ask you to decide for the Master to-day ; because, by the hardening process of the gathering years, your life shall at last crystallize into awful and permanent defiance of God.

My friends, there are pivotal hours in every man's life, hours when risk and opportunity seem to culminate. It is a pivotal hour when you choose the profession or business which is to be your life-work,—when you make decision in matters which are to make or unmake your fortune. We go on through life quietly for months and years, and then all at once there comes an hour when the decision of the moment counts more, weighs more heavily, than the decisions of years which have gone before it. But the most momentous hour of earthly life is that hour when God reaches out to us with special proffers of His mercy. Aaron Burr met such an hour when, in a New England village, a faithful servant of God presented Jesus to him. For hours afterwards, it is said, Aaron Burr paced his chamber floor till long past midnight, and finally looked out upon the stars and bade God good-bye, and determined henceforth to live only for ambition. And his life henceforth becomes one long career

of shame and ignominy. Oh, my friends, I wish I could paint for you, with all the sunlit vividness that this truth possesses, how eternally important are these hours of tenderness when, in conscious hush of soul, you hear God's voice pleading with your heart. The very angels crowd the galleries, and watch with breathless interest the struggle in your soul. Whitherward will you turn your face? I pray you turn it towards the Master before the hour of choosing God shall pass away forever.

Some of you, perhaps, have read that little story of "Laddie." A country boy wishing to make his fortune, comes to the great city of London. By and by he becomes a physician and gathers wealth and fame. His associations become most aristocratic and his handsome stone house becomes filled with the most artistic and beautiful things. For many years he made frequent visits to the old country home and his old country mother, but by and by the visits become more infrequent, and although he sent at regular intervals large sums of money to the old country mother, he at last never went to see her, and the mother's heart was breaking at her son's neglect. So one day she came to London and stood on the door-step of the great stone house. The servant admitting her, left her standing in the hall, and told the doctor that a queer old woman from the country wished to see him. And he

went into the hall to find his mother, and she said, "Laddie, I have come to stay with you, you are my boy, you know; I cannot bear the separation, I'll never leave you any more." The doctor took his mother into his private room and there they talked. He thought of his aristocratic friends, of the society in which he went, of the young girl whom he was so soon to marry, and then of his mother's strange country dress and stranger country manners, and he was ashamed of his old mother. And he said, "Mother, I don't think you had better stay here, you will be happier with your old friends. I will rebuild the country home for you; you shall have everything money will give you, but I don't think you will be happy here in this great city." And the poison of her son's infidelity entered her soul. The doctor went out and told the servants to prepare a room for an old nurse, and soon they retired for the night. After Laddie was in bed the door opened softly and in came the old mother. She came to the bedside and arranged the clothes and said, "Laddie, I want to tuck you up again just as I used to do," and printing a kiss on his brow, turned and went away. Then there came a rush of noble, generous impulse to that doctor's heart. He said to himself, "Nay, she is my mother, I will not be ashamed of her. She shall live with me at my own house," and in the triumph of that noble resolution, he fell

asleep. On the morning he dressed and went joyfully to his mother's room, but the bed had not been touched. He called his carriage, flew to the railway station, took the fastest train to the country town. She had not been there. He returned to the city, summoned detectives and put the police of the great city at work to find her. Month after month he continued the search until six months had passed, and then again with unremitting effort till a year had passed. Men, as they passed him, said to one another, "What a change has come over that man." His form began to be bent, and his hair was sprinkled with gray, and his step had lost its spring. After eighteen long months had passed, one day in going through a hospital, an attendant asked him to come and see an old woman who had been run over by an omnibus, and was all the time talking about "tucking up Laddie in bed." He hastened to the little cot to find the almost lifeless and insensible form of his dying mother, all too late to find forgiveness.

My friends, how this illustrates exactly our treatment of the Master. We are willing to send money to Him by the way of foreign missions, but we do not want Him very near us, and when He comes to us and says, "My son, I have come to abide with you, to live in your very heart," we show this Jesus that we want Him not. Oh, it is a pivotal hour for each one of us when the

Master comes to us with such a tender message. Oh, friends, how dare we say Him nay? For if we let the Master go hence now, He may never come again, and although we may seek Him in tears and desolate sorrow, we may not find Him. Oh, but this hour is such an hour and just now the Master is speaking to us. Who of us will decide for Christ to-day? Who will say the "I will" to Jesus? What young men will rise to the full height of their manhood in a noble, resolute and uncompromising purpose to live for Christ from this time forth? May God help you and bless you! Amen!

JACOB

“Fear not, thou worm Jacob
 . . . I will help thee, saith
the Lord.”

—*Isa. 41 : 14.*

XI

JACOB

THE life of Jacob was a paradox full of contradictions and violent alternations. The first glimpse you get of him is a glimpse of just about the meanest, smallest kind of a man you ever saw. You lift your eyes for a second or two and you see him the favored one of God, with wonderful visions of God's glory and wonderful experiences of communion with Him. You go a little further and you find him still plying deceit and practicing meanness, and again you have the vision of the patriarch wrestling with angels and camping with God's host about him. A Jew, Jacob was, crafty, mean, over-reaching and deceitful; and yet at the same time filled with high and lofty aspirations, a prince in prayer owned and loved of God.

Now there are a good many Jacobs in the world to-day. Men who are singular contradictions of great spirituality and greater meanness. When you see them in their business you would think they belonged to the devil's own body-guard, but when you see on a Sunday how fervently they say their creed, you would count

them as the most spiritual and earnest of Christians. Such characters are dual in their nature. With one life they are plying their deceit and sin and with the other worshiping their Maker. This is our modern Jacob. Now the question that has been often balanced in every mind is, what of these Jacobs? What are we going to do with them? And how are we going to rate them? Do they belong in truth to the number of Christ's redeemed or are they hypocrites professing Godliness? Do you wonder that we ask ourselves the question, how is it that such profession of faith and inconsistency of life can exist together, how that there can be true heart knowledge of Christ and great sins side by side in the same heart?

I. Now the first thing I want you to notice is that there are just such people in the world whose faith is a reality and yet whose inconsistencies are fearful. This dual life, this strange mingling of faith and inconsistency is a fact which we are unable to do away with. I tell you, my friends, we never seem to take into account differences in our individuality. Now there are some great-hearted, impulsive people to-day who are always making mistakes, always doing and saying things they are sorry for, who can understand Jacob exactly—and then there are others of calm, peaceful temperament, who fail utterly to understand him. Look at the characters our subject

brings before us. There was Isaac, one of your quiet, noble men, entirely domestic—loving peace and tranquillity. I do not believe he ever said a cross word in his life. His individuality was like a dreamy summer afternoon, quiet, peaceful, sunny. Now Isaac could not understand Jacob any more than a gentle, peaceful breeze can understand the terrific fury of the cyclone. Isaac and Jacob were essentially of different individuality. Isaac was never inconsistent. I suppose his neighbors never saw in Isaac anything to be condemned, but Jacob's soul was like a charged thunder-cloud, sure sooner or later to break forth into startling inconsistency. It is just so to-day; the Isaacs can never understand the Jacobs. And then there was Esau. Esau had a little round bullet head—was a warm-hearted, affectionate boy—fond of hunting and outdoor sports. If he had lived to-day he would have been fond of athletics and had about as much industry or religion as the modern newsboy and been popular with his fellows. But the trouble with Esau was he was thoughtless, careless of serious things, more bent on enjoying the present than anything else—without any deep undertone to his life. Now Esau couldn't understand Jacob either. His temptations and individuality were totally different. Isn't there enough warning in this picture to cry a stop to those of you who are always criticising other people's faults? What

do you know of their individuality? Their faults may not be as bad as yours. The worst faults are not always the most conspicuous ones. A sin which no one but God can see may be immeasurably worse than the inconsistencies that everybody has knowledge of. Here goes an upright, moral man. He prides himself on his honorable and moral life, and yet, when you look into his face you find he is cold and calculating and selfish. When asked to give to some most importunate and worthy cause he invariably quietly refuses, and when you look more closely into his life you find he is hard and stern in his dealings with his fellow men. Over against this picture let me paint another, that of a man with the warmest of hearts, a noble nature in truth, and yet, his individuality is such that he has an ungovernable temper which he cannot always control, or possibly a thirst for drink which leads him into great sin. Now our moral man with his narrow and contemptible little nature looks with infinite disdain upon this Jacob, whose life is so full of flagrant evil, and yet, my friends, the only difference is that the sins of the one are more conspicuous than the sins of the other; and as for me, I believe the man with the great, large, noble nature stained as it is with its sin, to be almost infinitely a better man than the sordid, moral man whose selfishness and littleness of soul are almost beneath contempt.

My friends, we all have great sins. The only difference lies in the conspicuousness of our sins. I think in the sight of God we all stand about on the same level. We all reach to heaven with the one hand and to the earth with the other. One eye looks to God and the other to the joys of earth.

Hence I think we are ready for the assertion that such paradoxes of faith and inconsistencies as Jacob, are facts in the world. Jacob's soul was on the one side filled with the sublimest hopes of the nation which was to spring from him, and on the other with strange craftiness and meanness. Esau despised his birthright. He cared nothing for God's promise about the chosen race and the promised land. Jacob on the other hand took God at His word. He believed in the promise. He had the faith that Esau was a stranger to, that faith which in the sight of God is all things. Jacob was one of the world's strong men. Whatever he did he did it with his heart and all the impulses of his nature were strong ones. When he leaned toward God he leaned hard. So also when he leaned toward evil. Jacob wasn't like Isaac, a smiling valley or a quiet lake—nay, Jacob's soul was the ocean lashed and torn by contrary and clashing storms, now dominated by his faith and now by his greed, now by pure and manly affection and now by despicable meanness. Yet all the time he was the same

Jacob—only heaven and hell were contending within him.

II. And now I want you to notice in the second place the necessary conflict in such a life. Here are two great opposing forces in Jacob's individuality. Two mighty armies are marshaled in his soul. On the one side the deceit and craftiness and meanness and on the other the better impulses of the man and his faith in God. To look at Jacob's individuality is to feel at once that his life must be a stormy one—one side or the other must triumph. His soul will be rent and tossed and buffeted till the very end. And when we look at Jacob's life we mark instantly its trial and conflict. The deceit is practiced upon his old father and Jacob has to fly from home. He entered at once upon the consequences of his sin. The reaping came very soon after the sowing. He left his father's house flying from his brother's wrath. It was a lonely walk that Jacob took towards Haran. As far as we know he seems to have journeyed all alone. I can well fancy that his thoughts must have been sad and tender as he hurried from his old home. I believe that repentance must have been welling up in his heart when he lay down that night at Bethel. Poor Jacob had only a stone for a pillow, but I believe that stone was wet with tears. His father had told him of the covenant blessing upon Abraham

which now was to descend with the birthright to Jacob and his seed. I can fancy how Jacob must have felt as he pondered over these parting words, and blessing of his father. Jacob was having a hard struggle in that lonely walk, but his faith for the moment prevailed and God gave to him, penitent and sore afraid, that comforting dream of the ladder with ascending and descending angels. Jacob's better life prevailed that day. And now that is only one of the struggles in that life. Jacob comes to his uncle's and finds it very far from being smooth sailing there. Here again his life is tossed and stormy. Ten times his wages are changed while Laban and Jacob vie with one another as to who shall outwit the other, and Jacob got cheated time and again. He got Leah for a wife when he wanted Rachael. It doesn't seem as if Jacob made much progress while at Haran. His craftiness the rather seemed to grow upon him and we have during those twenty years almost no glimpse of his faith. And now the time comes when he has to leave his uncle. The disagreements between himself and his uncle are increasing both in number and in fierceness, and Jacob flees unto his own country again—but he has great reason to fear there too, for there is the old quarrel between him and Esau. Jacob stands between two fires. His uncle on the one hand is plainly

unfriendly, and he stands in deadly fear of his brother, but he takes his journey back towards his old home. And now he hears that Esau is coming against him with an armed band. Jacob divines Esau's object. He knows that the thirst for revenge is still strong in his brother's heart. He knows that he stands in great personal danger. He makes his arrangements to propitiate his brother by presents and betakes himself to the mountain alone to pray. Ah! that was the pivotal hour of Jacob's life for he met God face to face in some such revelation hour as Paul experienced on that way to Damascus. We cannot fully understand the mystery of that midnight wrestling in the darkness with God, but I think this much is plain—it was the struggle of repentance, the strong crying and tears of a soul deeply conscious of its guilt and pleading for forgiveness. There may have been repentance before, sorrow for his sin, but his life had not been changed. Now at this crisis hour when the long-deferred punishment seemed to stare him in the face, now Jacob saw his sin in its true light, and helpless and penitent he cried importunately to God. All along before he had trusted in his craftiness rather than relied on God. Now his craftiness cannot save him. He is forced to fly to God, and he goes to Him in an agony of penitence and fear and God meets him—God the avenger, the unnamable, the awful

presence meets him now in condemnation. All the night he wrestles with the angel—pleads with God—bemoans his sin—supplicates forgiveness ; until at last the blessing falls upon him, and then Jacob becomes the humbled penitent, with a new name and a new character ; no longer strong in his own strength but a prince with God, to be known henceforth as Israel, one who has power with God and with man.

My friends, the life of every Jacob must be a stormy one. To have great opposing forces in one's heart is to have a life full of conflict and bitter strife. So tossed are we at times that it seems as if our lives were but a shuttlecock for our virtues and our vices to sport with in their fierce games at battledore. Now driven hard by vice and now checked by virtue and tossed back again to right and faith and God, but no sooner safe than seized again by vice and hurled, to be caught again by patient virtue. So goes the game of our probation and the madder our vices are and more persistent our virtues, the more will our lives be tossed like helpless puppets between heaven and hell. Every life must struggle but with most characters who are striving to live Christian lives the good aided by the Christ is the predominating motive in the heart. Hence such lives are approximately consistent, but not so with forceful natures like Jacob's. There is too much of evil there to yield

except by fiercest struggle. Such a life must be a stormy one, now lifted high to heaven, now plunged to deep abysses—fighting its way 'mid weariness and pain and trial to the end.

Thank God for the Jacobs and the Peters and the Davids in the Bible, for they too, like some of us, had much in their individuality that they had to struggle against, and their lives were inconsistent and storm tossed, and yet the Lord loved them and trusted them. I find in the picture hope for every sin-burdened and sin-conscious heart. How many of us have looked on our neighbors who seem always unruffled and peaceful in their religion with a quiet but real envy. Aye, my friends, their individuality is different. Our lives must be stormy and agitated and unrestful. The trouble is our name is Jacob. God will bring trouble and sorrow to us too as He did to Jacob. Our individuality is such that such a course alone can develop us. Think it not strange then concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, but rejoice, for God knows best and has apportioned your life struggle for you.

III. But I want you to notice in the third place the triumph of Jacob's life. Some of you may have read that most interesting and striking little story of Robert Louis Stevenson called "The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde." The truth within it is as deep as the universe. It is the story of a doctor who had many noble

qualities of heart and life which made him beloved by all who knew him but who had at the same time with this nobler side of his nature, cravings after a lower life which occasionally he indulged. In the day, as he labored, he was in deep earnest to relieve the sorrow of the world and to uplift his fellow man, and at night he would oftentimes seek the lower haunts of shame. At length this dual life went on so far that he became conscious of two separate and distinct natures within him—one benevolent, kind and righteous, the other mean, unmanly and vicious. Finally it became a passion with him to separate these two natures in some way, and in his experiments in his laboratory he concocted a mixture which had a wonderful transforming power. When this drug was taken, the tall and finely formed Dr. Jekyll became dwarfish in stature, changed in countenance and changed also in disposition and feeling, for the baser self was predominant over the changed and shrunken form. He became conscious of most horrid impulses to sin while the better impulses of his life lay absolutely dormant. After a few hours, if he took again the drug, he found himself restored to his old stature and form and benevolence of heart. This transformation became a passion with the doctor. He called himself when changed thus, Mr. Hyde, and instructed his servants always to admit this Mr. Hyde to the

house. In his changed form he committed crimes and ran a riot of shame until at last he murdered in cold blood an innocent friend. And now the city police are searching for the form of this Mr. Hyde and the doctor determines from fear of detection to stop the transformation of himself into his baser self ; but alas, he has trifled with the powerful drug too long, and he finds that now the change comes without the influence of the drug, and while before, a second portion of the drug would change him back again, now a much larger dose is necessary, and finally it ceases to affect him altogether. In the meantime he has taken permanently the horrid form and features of his baser self. My friends, this story, weird, improbable as it seems, is nevertheless in its picturing of character most terribly true. There are two selves in each of us, and they are contending for the mastery. Sometimes it is the better self that acts, sometimes the baser, and your choices are the drug. But the truth most emphasized in this weird story is that one or the other of these selves is gathering permanence and is bound to prevail. With Jacob it was his better self. The long vacillation of his life between God and evil was at last ended and Jacob's declining years present the most beautiful picture in the Bible of rich and abiding trust in God. His old inconsistencies seem to have been stamped out. Triumphant faith

transfigured and illumined with strange glory the last years of Jacob's life. Tender and affectionate, submissive under God's chastisements, a prince in faith, point me out if you can a death more beautiful and glorious than Jacob's. No trace now in the last years of life of the old sins, the baser self. Jacob's nobler side had conquered. The brute within him had yielded to the white robed angel. Heaven had triumphed gloriously in his life.

Oh, my friends, troubled with many a conflict, which is getting the better of it in the battle in your breast, your noblest or your baser self? All high heaven is watching, and the angels crowd the galleries, hanging breathless upon the struggle there. Every time you practice meanness, or give way to temper or to lust, or whatsoever else is your besetment, you are contributing to the final triumph of the baser self—but every aspiration that rises to heaven, every heartfelt prayer, every sob of penitence, every wailing cry for help, every noble, manly struggle against sin, is a step towards the triumph of the soul. Oh, my friends, I wish I could impress upon you with all the sunlit vividness that this truth possesses, the importance of this daily, hourly struggle against sin; for it is in these moments that our lives and character are taking form for eternity. If we act more often in the baser self, by and by the baser self shall be the only self, and our char-

acters will crystallize in awful and eternal permanence in evil, but if we let our better selves triumph, then glory and honor shall await us at the last.

And oh, the lesson that we need most of all to learn, is the lesson Jacob learned at Peniel—that this victory over baser self is only possible when we lie defeated, humbled at God's feet—our own strength all gone—our own littleness vividly revealed to us—and our all surrendered unto Jesus. Then God shall help and the power of the Highest take sides with us in our life battle. What we need is a wrestling with the angel, a going off alone like Jacob to make the past right with God. We shall come out from such a wrestling with broken thigh, with humbled pride and human strength all gone, but with face aflame with God, and right arm nerved by heaven's omnipotent strength. No man can win the hard, terrible battle of his life until he has met God face to face at Peniel—for not human strength or purpose, but only God Himself can change Jacob, cheat, supplanter, crafty one, to Israel, prince having power with God and man. Oh, my friends, of great faults and great virtues, God can use you, can make you a mighty nation in His service. Be sure then that your better self is triumphing, that amid all the storm and struggle of life you are swerving towards God and not away from Him. Go alone to the mountain and wres-

tle with your sin, and meet your God, and you shall prevail, and God shall use you and make your very name a heritage of blessing. Get courage then from this lesson, and remember the word of the Lord, "Fear not, thou worm Jacob, I will help thee, saith the Lord, and thy Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel."

THE RUSH
AND THE MIRE

“Can the rush grow up
without mire?”

—*Job 8 : 11.*

XII

THE RUSH AND THE MIRE

SOME are born in Godly homes and circles, and others in the tenements of sin and degradation. Hence some are starting in this race for life eternal, with every omen favorable, with every help and inspiration at their side, and others are heavily conditioned and handicapped at the start by the environment of grossest evil.

It becomes a question then of most pathetic interest, what shall be the power and influence of one's environment? Must character and destiny take their stamp from the immediate surroundings, and are we thus the playthings and the puppets of a cruel, resistless fate? Is there no escape from the fatal, constraining power of these life relations? Is it true that you, born in a Godly home, shall sail with every favoring wind to heaven, while I, surrounded by the vilest evils of a sin-cursed world, seem absolutely destined to early and fatal shipwreck of character and hope? "Oh, God, where is the justice of it all!" No mystery appals me more in this life of thronging mysteries than the destiny of those, every influence of whose surroundings is fatal to a higher

life. No thoughtful man can walk through the slums of our great cities and see the swarming life of sin, without being conscious of the persistent question of a heart oppressed. "What of these, O! Lord? What chance have these, Thy children, whose lives from very infancy are all environed by the foulest sin?"

From this sad thought the text gives suggestion of relief—"Can the rush grow up without mire?" The thought is that the flag, or rush, that useful plant manufactured in Eastern countries into so many articles of use and beauty, needs not the highlands and greensward, but the miasmas and the foulness of the marsh for growth, that even from the vilest of surroundings there may be drawn, through the gracious sunlight of God's power, healing and life-giving juices which may build up strength and gladness. I wonder can the thought be true in individual life? Is it possible that from untoward and evil surroundings there shall spring to life piety and faith in Jesus? Shall the rush spring from the mire and filth of human life? Or, must the surrounding evil fix its own vile pollution on the character? Who shall answer? Much of life's sad and mournful mystery centers in and about the answer to this question.

I. At the very outset we must admit the mighty constraining influence of one's surroundings. The influence of environment is recognized

in every phase and sphere of life. The plastic nature of childhood takes shape from the mold in which it lies. The environment stamps itself upon it as a seal upon the softened wax. We forget how sensitive the child-soul is to impressions upon every side; but look within and see how indelibly marked upon your soul are the early prayers learned at the cradle-side, and the early teachings which remain to-day in all their sunlit vividness. And then remember how the curses of men and the blasphemy of lower life must leave impressions just as indelible and lasting upon the child-soul near, as the early influences about your life. Herbert Spencer says the great part of knowledge in this life is learned in the first half dozen years when the child is learning its surroundings. It is a fearful thought! The soul of childhood is as sensitive as the sensitive plate of the photographer to whatever may surround it. Every influence near is reproduced upon the soul, never wholly to be removed.

Look about you in society. Men constantly are making their environment to bear their sin, excusing flagrant iniquity by pleading unfortunate surroundings. Here is a boy standing in the court accused of crime. Listen as he tells the judge of bad company in which his steps were led astray. And here again is the business man, a professed follower of Jesus, yet so unscrupulous in trade as to bring dishonor on his

church and his profession. Listen again, and he pleads the necessities of business ; the sharp, and, as he thinks, justifiable tricks of trade as fair excuse for his shameful sin. And here once more is the society woman, forced, as she weakly thinks, into questionable conventionalities ; into Sabbath desecration ; into a thousand social sins, by the demands of the circle in which she moves, and appeasing conscience by making her associations to bear her sin. In the face of these illustrations from every phase of life, the question comes with new persistency—shall such excuses avail to justify us to our God ? Are the influences of our surroundings the fatal silken cords which are to bind fast our arms and limbs and hold us captive in the meshes of our sin ? Has character no appeal from the fearful constraining power of its surroundings ? Great God ! where is our freedom then ? Where is the hope for the world's unfortunate ? Where is the refuge or relief, O ! God, for Thy poor, misguided children from this hopeless and despairing fatalism ?

II. But we are ready now for a second thought. Notice that the influence of surroundings is not the *deciding* influence in life. Let me paint two pictures for you. The one is that of a religious home ; a family where the things of God are matters of daily conversation ; where a family altar lifts the soul to God, and there in such a

home is an only son, frittering away his life in vice, absolutely worthless in any station, unfaithful in business, impure in life, wilful and headstrong in his course to ruin.

Turn now to another view, and here is a young man born in a saloon, reared amid blackest haunts of sin, and yet withal, frugal, industrious, spurning vice, holding an unflinching purpose to rise above his surroundings. These are not uncommon pictures in true life. I could point to just such cases as I have used for illustration. They prove one thing at least; that the power of circumstances is *not* all constraining. That none is forced to ruin here. There are men in this world who put to defiance every surrounding influence for good or evil, and whose characters disappoint every prophecy of their environment. Experience denies this fatalism of life. I am not a waif upon the sea; not a drifting vessel; not a helpless log. There are inner principles within; the throbbing power and life of resolute, determined will, and by these inner principles my life-motion can be absolutely governed and directed. I am not a straw at mercy of the winds. Thank God! the determining of character lies not without but within the soul, in the living reality and invincible power of a free and unconditioned will.

When the officers of Napoleon objected to his march to Italy, "Master the Alps, the Alps!"

the invincible will of the conqueror replied, "There shall be no Alps." And before that determined power the Alps became as level plain. Every great reform, every grand, inspiring movement in the world's history has grown from the defiant stand of determined will against surrounding forces. All history is instinct with the truth that within the soul of man there lies a power which can defy every circumstance surrounding, aye, which can, in the help of God, fashion the surrounding to its will. Environment shall not always give the shape to character. Strong, resolute, determined character shall be the model to give shape and form to the surrounding mold.

And right here lies the difference between the weak and the strong in character. It is the weak characters in life who are absolutely the creatures of circumstances, the sport of every wind, the playthings of the tides. Their will power never gets aroused to the resisting of the unfortunate tendencies around them. They are willing to give up their self-mastery, their self-direction, to give up, in fact, their very manliness, and to drift lazily with every current. The business man suffering his conscience to be blinded by deceit and unrighteousness in trade, is only weakly drifting with that current to the sure loss of his manliness and the ruin of his faith. The young man who has no ambition to

rise above surroundings but weakly allows the circumstances of his life to mold and shape his character, has not enough manhood in him to be called a man. I tell you, my friends, it is the weak characters that take their form and shape and destiny from their surroundings. They are like drifting vessels, drifting lazily to shipwreck, and yet with throbbing steam and splendid machinery all equipped to save them if they would only use it.

Not so with strong, and resolute, and manly characters; who know the tides of life are not resistless floods; who know, too, that to the human soul is given power and will to triumph over every surrounding force; that the human will can defy them all. Oh, men, I tell you, I am free! I'm free! Yes, free to float lazily to a bitter end, free to drift to ruin, but thank God, free to rise to Him, to heaven, with resistless power pulsing within me that can laugh at fate or fortune; that can put to absolute defiance my environment. Let the Alps face me if they will, let difficulties throng my steps, nay, let contrary tides sport with my very life and fortune, they have no fatal or determining power. The determining of character and destiny lies within, thank God, and not without. I am not a creature of environment. My consciousness denies it. I am the carver of my destiny, the architect of my own eternal fortunes.

This may be true, I can hear you say, with the strongest life, but what of characters whose wills are weak and forceless? The answer is, that God's help can supplement and fill out human strength. I know that the drift of worldliness and sin is a rushing flood to overwhelm us—but, I know too the power of God in human life; how that the gathered might of omnipotence is ready, waiting our call in any emergency or crisis of our life.

At the bottom of the River Rhine there lies a heavy, iron cable; through the swiftest currents and the rapids here and there, the heavy steam barges can only make their way by gripping this cable in their powerful gripping wheels and slowly, hand over hand as it were, steam against the current. I remember to have floated down that river in a terrific storm. Here and there under shelter of some promontory were the smaller boats, and here at the side safely anchored huge steamers, and here a shipwrecked schooner, blown by the wind and current on the rocks. In the center of the stream, as if unmindful of the waves and storm, a single heavy barge was breasting every difficulty and slowly moving up the current; as we drew near I saw that heavy iron cable around the gripping wheels at the barges' side. That explained it all. It was clinging to the heavy cable and making its way grandly up the stream against the current, and

the waves and storm. So, I thought, at the bottom of every tide of life, through every current of its evil, there lies a ready help for man, the heavy iron cable of God's unfailing strength. Let me grip that cable and I will laugh at all the storms of evil. I will defy and mock its every tide and current.

Oh, yes, my friends, God's help alone avails. Gigantic is the power of surrounding sin, but omnipotent is God, and the weakest in His strength may overcome. No human will is strong enough alone to grapple with its sin, but in Christ we can meet it and triumph over it. For every contrary tide there is a cable. Fortunate the man who grips and holds to Jesus. He alone shall know a lasting and perfect victory.

And now I think we are ready for a final question. We have traced the mighty influence of our environment, and the power that lies within the will to defy it all. I ask then, may it not be that that which we consider unfortunate environment is after all, when rightly used, the one most suited for us? We differ widely in our individualities. Some of us are like the elm, or oak, or maple, or bushes growing by the wayside. May it not be that some of us too are like the rush or flag, needing the mire and marsh for best development? Who shall say that God, who lives and reigns in human life, blunders in the

surroundings He has given us? I dare not say it, even if my life be surrounded by sorrow, or sin, or poverty, or whatsoever there seems to me unfortunate. I may be a flag or bulrush in God's planting, needing just the elements in my environment which He has placed there. Can the rush grow up without mire? Can my character be perfected except by the very surroundings in which my loving Father places me? We are not tossed by chance into this or that sphere of life for the powers of fate and sin to wreak their vengeance on, but sent from the hand of God with unerring aim to the very place He destines us to fill; and that place, whatever be its unfortunate surroundings as we think, if only rightly filled will give to us the true and best development of soul. God lives and reigns! I accept it. I believe it. He lives and reigns in individual lives. I believe it with the profoundest conviction of which my soul is capable.

And though we cavil at surroundings and weakly plead them in excuse to heaven, making them to bear our sin, yet God knows that when rightly used they will give to us our best and ripest growth. You have prosperity and a Godly home. You need the highlands and the green-sward. My life is all enswathed in poverty, and trial, and sin. I need the mire and the marsh of life. God understood it all when He sent us each

to his place in life. Shall I murmur and complain because of mire and swamp surrounding? Can the rush grow up without mire?

And yet our thought is not complete without a single concluding admonition. See to it that you make right use of your surroundings. I venture to say there is scarcely a man to-day who has not murmured against the unfortunate circumstances of his life. We are always thinking that it would be so easy to serve God if we stood in different circumstances. I venture to add there is not one who has not sought to lay his sin upon his surroundings, just as if God had forced him into sin. The truth is, we are most of us in the mire of some kind, the mire of sorrow, of trial, of misfortune, of sinful influences about us, and each one of us is discontented to-day because of the circumstances of life, and imagining that we have the hardest of trials to bear, the most unfortunate of all surroundings about us. We cry, it is no use to strive further in such surroundings, and weakly fold our arms and drift with the tide. Oh, friends, when will we learn the lesson that the environing conditions of life are God's own setting for our souls. If we cannot serve Him in the place where He has put us, we can never serve Him in any other either. We think we could, but the trouble lies not in our surroundings, but in ourselves. In this sin-cursed world, in this wrestle with the tempter, in this life-grapple with the

powers of darkness, unseen foes throng every path and sphere of life to trip our footsteps that we fall. Outwardly it seems as if our surroundings differed much in advantage and possibility of growth, but some day we shall know how that to be, is to be tempted, whatsoever be the earthly environment; how that to live at all is to be nearly lost; how that every phase and sphere of life has its peculiar trials and difficulties and giant temptations.

Give up then your weak repinings, your vain wishings that life for you were better placed, more favorably conditioned, and seek to use aright the circumstances God has placed about you. However differing may be surroundings, it is the same great azure heaven that enfolds us all above. It is the same streaming sunlight that falls alike on all. It is the same blessed power of God that is ready to baptize your life and mine. You stand upon the hill and lift your leaves and branches to the fluttering wind, the sweet rains and the beaming light, and power is given you to draw strength and nourishment from your fortunate surroundings. But just as truly to me in the mire and swamp of life, if I lift my head to the rains and streaming light of heaven, to me is given power to draw from my vile surroundings healing juices which shall build up strength and gladness. I cannot understand it. It is all a mystery to me, but the

secret lies in a head forever lifted heavenward. Thank God, human life is varied in condition only at the side and never overhead. It is the same blue sky and streaming light of God's surrounding love which enfolds us all. We have only to lift our heads to God and heaven, and power divine is given us to draw from our surroundings, whatever they may be, life-sustaining forces. Our blessed Lord stands just as near to me in my environment of evil as to you in Godly home and circle. And I know His grace will be sufficient for me.

Not the differences in our surroundings will be the measure of our eternal success. For many that are first shall be last and the last first. But the utterance that the power of God gets in my life, that shall measure it. In proportion to the God-power in the building up of character, in the shaping of our destiny, the human factors of environment shrink into inconceivable littleness.

Oh, friends, the marsh and mire of life's misfortune and sin may hold you, but an infinite heaven is above you, pouring upon your head its streaming help and gladness. Let there be no barrier between your soul and God's most blessed power and light. Then I care not what may be the circumstances which surround you, in the sunlight of God's love you shall draw from your surroundings just the life-giving juices

which you need. The rush grows in the mire because of streaming sun and light. Your soul shall grow only in the enswathing light and power and helpfulness of God.

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